

Once again Christmas is upon us and we approach the end of another year. Every year lamentations are voiced as to how commercial Christmas has become, how it's all about over indulgence, over spending and false jollity. The true meaning of Christmas has been lost. These very sentiments were expressed to me only a few days ago by an individual who said he didn't celebrate Christmas. He said it wasn't just the excess but the anticipation of the day which so often, in reality, fell far short of the expectation. It's all a sham. He went on to say that it was when he began working with homeless people that his aversion to Christmas really took hold. He felt it was wrong for so many to be celebrating when so many others had so little.



too terrible to think of. But he found that this 'hostel' was homely and welcoming.

We helped James get the extra support he needed for the mental and physical health difficulties his experience had caused him. When ready we supported him to apply for housing and as always we helped him set-up home.

As he told us on the day he moved to his own flat;

"From the moment I walked through your door I felt things would be better, I felt safe and above all as if someone cared about me"



But isn't it the spirit, or message, of Christmas that moves so many to see this injustice and even in the mist of the excess and the commercialism they act to alleviate that hardship?



James' Story

James had a career, a job he enjoyed and was settled in a home of his own. In fact he was only two years from owning his home outright. Then, in his late 50's, he was made redundant. Demoralised and feeling a failure for his unemployment, even though it was through no fault of his own, he found it very difficult to find another job. His redundancy payment was not large, he had an overdraft, which his bank withdrew on finding he was no longer having a salary paid into his account. Before long he fell into arrears on his mortgage. He didn't know what to do or who to turn to, he couldn't believe this was happening to him. He lost his home and spent two nights on the streets of Newcastle before we were able to help. When he arrived at our service he couldn't believe what he found. He had spent nights on the street because the thought of being in a 'hostel' was just

Donations to charities such as ours increase at Christmas. People volunteer to help in night shelters, food kitchens, as hospital visitors and perform other acts of kindness, admittedly not only at Christmas, but particularly so over the Christmas period. Is this because the message of Christmas is so strong it remains true, come what may? The message of Christianity is simple but so powerful. Asking only that we love, without condition, all others in this world, because they, like us, are made in God's image and therefore are worthy of our consideration and respect.



Sally's Story

Sally was 26 when she became homeless. Escaping an abusive relationship years of mental and physical abuse had left her with depression, anxiety and very low self-esteem.

"Things in my life were all going wrong, I found myself homeless. With nothing, they were very dark days for me. I was dreading coming to a 'hostel' it just sounds so horrible. But it wasn't like a hostel it was like a home. The staff were welcoming and the other residents were helpful, friendly and kind. I joined in the training courses which helped a lot and I started to build my confidence back up.

I started a basic Maths and English course and was helped to bid on a flat and managed to get it! Gap helped me to do all these things and with other things I wasn't sure about, like electric, gas, rent payments. It's over a year later and I am doing great. My mental health has improved and I know if I need anything I can ring Gap and they will help or advise me. It's a real help knowing that I have the support I've needed for so long"



Homelessness can effect anyone, there is no single 'type' of homeless person, and no single reason for homelessness. The circumstances that led to a person needing our help are as varied as the individuals themselves. All we see is the person that needs our help. This year alone we have support almost fifty homeless and vulnerable individuals to take the first steps out of homelessness and towards a more positive future. The year has also seen our registration with *Street Paws* and their *Dog Champion Scheme*. We have always recognised that for many homeless individuals their dog is the one friend that has never let them down and that's why we are one of the few homelessness services in the country to allow dogs into the accommodation. Having been registered with the Dogs Trust for many years the recent registration with *Street Paws* has allowed us to improve the support we can offer to both dog and owner.



A glimpse of our tree in this years Festival at St Andrew's Church, Corbridge

The help we are able to give is made possible by the financial support of many organisations and individuals. The donations we receive from local churches, small associations and clubs and individuals makes a real and positive difference to the lives of those in our service.

The ability to provide Christmas dinner and Christmas presents to everyone; to help when moving to a new home, providing basic furnishings and a cooker, fridge or washing machine, is all thanks to the generosity of people like you.

As a young child I was lucky enough to have a wonderful Primary School headteacher, Mr Sanderson. Each Friday afternoon in the weeks leading to Christmas he would read to us 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens. The love of that book, and Dickens, has stayed with me ever since.

I make no apology for ending with a quote from that wonderful book. The words of Fred, Scrooges Nephew;

"But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys".

Once again we send you our heartfelt thanks for helping us to help so many.

Andrew Sanders – CEO



**WITH EVERY BEST WISH FOR A
HAPPY AND PEACEFUL
CHRISTMAS FROM ALL AT GAP
SUPPORTED HOUSING**



All donations received contribute directly to our work of supporting homeless and vulnerable people.

Donations can be made via our website. Cheque payable to Gap Supported Housing Ltd

Bank details: Co-Op Bank. Acc: Gap Supported Housing Ltd. No: 67301098 Sort Code: 08-92-99

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