

Porchlight



POST RO P

Summer 2024

Issue 20



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Marking 50 years of changing lives together



This year, Porchlight celebrates its 50th anniversary. We're so proud of everything that's been achieved, but we know there's still a lot of work to do. People need us now more than ever.

Some of you have expressed concern about the future of Porchlight, following the recent funding cuts. We want to reassure everyone that our hostels haven't closed. Thanks to your generosity to our recent appeal, we now have enough money to keep them open into next year. And our support services for people who are sleeping rough or struggling with their mental health are still in operation.

We're launching longer term plans to help rebuild the safety nets communities have lost after years of government austerity. Whether someone is struggling with housing, money or health – we want to be there when it matters most.

With you by our side, we'll keep working towards a safer home, better life and fairer future for everyone.

Chief executive Mike Barrett retires



After 24 years of driving Porchlight's life-saving work, our chief executive Mike Barrett has retired.

Working tirelessly alongside the people we support, staff and supporters, Mike transformed Porchlight from a single homelessness hostel, to a regional charity supporting thousands of people with homelessness, housing and health each year.

Mike wishes us well as we enter our 50th year. He says: "I leave behind a wonderful team that will continue to face the challenges of today's world with dedication, professionalism and humanity."

The role is being covered by Cath Keen, our chief finance and operating officer, until a permanent chief executive is appointed later in the year.



Rebuilding Kent's homelessness support

We were founded to help people facing the devastating effects of homelessness. Today, we also tackle the causes and effects of poverty and inequality. We work to find sustainable solutions to rebalance an unfair system.

We're exploring new ways of providing supported housing in Kent and the South East, so there are safety nets when people need them.

These include:

- Short-term shared housing for people with low support needs: this would benefit someone who's recently lost their home. They're given somewhere to live and help to get back on their feet.
- Longer-term housing for people who need a bit more support: they may have issues related to mental or physical health, or problems with drugs or alcohol. With the security of their own front door and some help, they'll feel empowered to take control of their life.
- A home for as long as it's needed for people with highly complex needs: other types of homelessness support may not have been right for them, leading to years on the streets. No specific conditions are placed on them when they move in – we just ask that they show willingness to work towards maintaining their tenancy.

In their own time, they will start to recover and regain their independence.

Growing homelessness support in West Kent

We're working with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to provide more specialised homelessness support in West Kent. This is part of our work to grow more services across the county, so we can reach more people.

We're providing people who have highly complex needs with homes for as long as they're needed (see page 2 to learn how this works).

We're also working with people in other types of homelessness accommodation and private rentals in Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks. We help them to overcome issues that cause housing instability, such as drug and alcohol misuse or problems with managing money.



And because people with complex mental health problems can find it difficult to leave the streets behind, we have specialist workers who know how to build trusting relationships and make them feel more comfortable accepting help.

We also work with Canterbury, Dover, Dartford, Medway, Sevenoaks, Shepway and Thanet councils.



Garden party for Bexley families

To celebrate summer, mothers and children at our Bexley hostel threw a garden party. The families enjoyed great weather, a range of party food, and lots of games for everyone.

"Thank you for everything, I am forever grateful" – somebody we helped, who has now moved into her own place with her daughter

We run this hostel in partnership with Bexley Council to prevent mothers and children ending up on the streets. They can get back on their feet and receive support for other issues they're facing, such as poor mental health or financial instability. We also help them to find private rented accommodation.

What to do if you see someone sleeping rough



If you see someone who needs help this summer, here are a few things you can do.

1. **Tell a charity.** Use our website to inform the nearest homelessness team: porchlight.org.uk/tell-us
2. **Buy them food or a drink.** This can be a big help and lets them know they're not forgotten. Asking what they'd like can also mean a lot.
3. **If it's hot, provide water, sunscreen or a hat.** You'll be protecting them from dehydration and heat exhaustion.
4. **Make a donation.** Even a small amount could make a big difference: porchlight.org.uk/donate

Porchlight resident "can't stop smiling" after haircut



Small steps forward can make a huge difference for someone when they are rebuilding their life after being homeless. One resident has gone from feeling shy to brimming with confidence after her first haircut since being homeless. She said: "I feel lighter somehow. Now I can walk down the street without being judged".

We suggested a haircut because she felt shy about leaving the house, and a support worker accompanied her because she was feeling anxious. Thanks to supporters like you she's brimming with newfound confidence.

Porchlight marks 50 years of changing lives together

Everybody deserves to have someone on their side when life gets tough

We were founded to help people facing the devastating effects of homelessness.

Today, we also tackle the causes and consequences of poverty and inequality.

There are so many achievements we want to celebrate this year, all thanks to the kindness and hard work of thousands of supporters like you. But we also need to acknowledge that today our communities face some of the toughest challenges yet and services like ours have never been more needed.

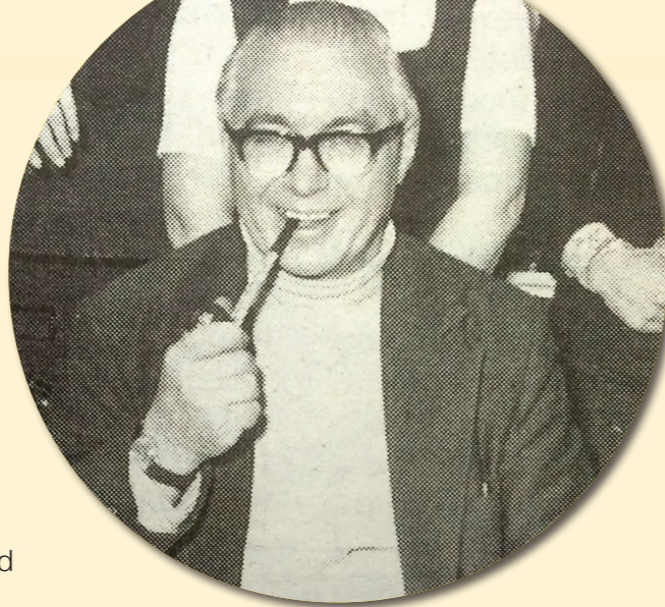
Inspired to improve lives

Tom Gifford and Anton Wallich-Clifford's (founder of the Simon Community for the homeless) paths crossed in a London hostel, and

Tom was immediately inspired by Anton's revolutionary approach to tackling homelessness and his dedication to improving the lives of people who had nowhere left to turn. Their chance encounter ignited a spark of inspiration that would shape the future of homelessness support in the UK.

In 1970, Tom and his wife Brigid established National Cyrenians, breathing new life into the Simon Community concept by creating safe havens where volunteers and residents could collaborate and thrive. This communal living approach proved successful, and the organisation quickly outgrew its humble premises and relocated to Canterbury City Centre in 1972.

Two years later, in 1974, they founded the Canterbury Cyrenians, later growing in 2002 to become the East Kent Cyrenians, and in 2008 – Porchlight.



Half a century later

Since then, everything we have achieved has been thanks to countless people like Tom sharing the same desire to make a positive difference – volunteers, supporters and staff all pulling together to be there when people need us most.

Fifty years ago, Tom couldn't have imagined that despite his lifesaving legacy, more people than ever would need our help today.

Homelessness, poverty, and inequality are rising across the UK. They are complex problems affecting millions of lives. They are also avoidable. We are proud

that, together, we've been able to help so many people. We hope we won't be needed in another 50 years. However, with funding cuts hitting us during the cost-of-living crisis, our services have never been more vital.

Join us as we mark our 50th year with a promise to continue to fight for a safe home, better life and fairer future for everyone.

There are many different ways you can get involved during our anniversary year. From taking part in one of our fundraising events, to donating in a loved one's memory or sleeping out under the stars for a night, at our first ever Big Sleep Out.

Email our friendly team to find out more: getinvolved@porchlight.org.uk.

Making a difference at the general election

When the next government is elected, addressing poverty, health and housing inequality needs to be high on its agenda.

Following the election announcement, we've been engaging with candidates from across the political spectrum – making sure they hear about the devastating issues our clients are facing.

We want the next government to know it must address the housing crisis, create a benefits system that works for everyone who needs it, and properly invest in homelessness and mental health support.

We've also been ensuring that everybody we work with has photo ID and will be encouraging them to vote for a party that aligns with their values on election day. We want to make sure people's voices are heard.



Tom Gifford couldn't have imagined that 50 years on, people would need our help more than ever. We're proud that, together, we've been able to help so many people.

2024 We've never been more needed

50 years on poverty, homelessness and mental ill health are at record levels. We know there are solutions. This year we're launching a new strategy setting out the steps we will take to help build back safety nets in Kent.

1970s



1974 Tom Gifford founds Canterbury Cyrenians

Having experienced homelessness himself, he wants to create a better future for others in the same position. Tom and his wife Brigid open a single hostel in Canterbury.



1980s



1987 More staff, beds and hostels

By now, there are three full-time members of staff and beds for 17 people. In the coming years, two more hostels are opened in Canterbury.



1990s



1997 Expansion: more staff, beds and services

We now have 18 staff members and beds for 70 people.

We expand our homelessness street outreach team to cover new areas and meet the growing number of people in Kent who need help.

2000s



2008 We change our name to Porchlight

We change our name from Canterbury Cyrenians to Porchlight. We now have hostels in Canterbury, Ashford, Dover and Thanet.



2010s



2015 Launch of homelessness helpline

We're able to launch a homelessness helpline thanks to Big Lottery funding. In the coming years, we also begin delivering mental health services.



2020s



2023 You helped keep our doors open

When local funding cuts hit our homelessness services we launched an emergency appeal raising over £125,000. Another landmark achievement, thanks to you.





Service offers help with mental health

Live well

Kent and Medway

We all feel anxious, depressed or lonely sometimes. If someone is struggling with their feelings, Live Well Kent & Medway is here to help.

It can also support with things that are affecting mental health, such as housing problems, debt and difficulties finding work.

Live Well Kent & Medway is a network of organisations – including Porchlight – working together to address all the issues someone may be facing.

Anyone can get help by contacting Live Well Kent & Medway direct, or someone like a doctor or friend can get in touch on their behalf.

Find out more here: livewellkent.org.uk



Help for young people struggling to access support

Last year, thanks to your generosity, we helped 725 young people dealing with mental health conditions.

The number of young people experiencing mental illness is at a record high, but teenagers in Kent can wait more than four months to receive support. Some never get any at all.

Because no young person should be unable to get the help they need, we run a mental health service that helps 10 to 18-year-olds manage depression, anxiety and any other issues that might be affecting their education and relationships.

Thanks to your support, we're exploring ways to expand this work across the county to help more young people.

Success stories

Lee* (aged 11) no longer lives in fear

Until recently, Lee was consumed with worries about something terrible happening to his family. Lee has been working with our mental health service for young people to manage these feelings.

Lee is no longer held hostage by his worries. He's doing better in school and enjoys being with his friends again. His relationship with his mum has also improved.

We got Lee tickets to The Lion King musical to say well done for overcoming his fears. Lee says he "feels free" for the first time in years.

**Lee is not his real name, but his story is 100% true.*



Rocco: "I've come a long way with the right support."

Rocco has struggled with anxiety for most of his life. He was working as a tree surgeon, but his mental health was getting in the way of him fulfilling his potential.

"I couldn't deal with anything. The slightest thing would set me off, and I'd just want to hibernate – sleep and hide away from it all."

Live Well Kent & Medway worker Vicky arranged for him to attend counselling sessions. They've made a big difference to his mental wellbeing.

"I was always anxious, but Vicky was dedicated to finding the right help for me. Now, I'm not hiding away anymore. I've picked myself right up and am going in the right direction."

Ashford community meet-up opens its doors



Thanks to you, we've launched our newest Porchlight Open Door meet up in Ashford.

The meet-ups are friendly get-togethers where people can make friends and access all the services they need. There are different activities every week, from cooking to painting to CV

writing – but there's no pressure to take part. Anyone (aged 18 and over) can just turn up for a chat.

They can also get advice for any issues they're facing, such as benefits, housing or debt.



Kev: "Now, I feel much more confident with numbers."

Kev celebrates his course success

Well done to our client Kev who recently completed a numeracy course.

"I didn't feel confident about maths and numeracy before," he says. "Now, I feel much more confident when dealing with numbers."

The course was delivered at one of our Porchlight Open Door meet-ups by the charity Forward Trust. We often have other charities and organisations offering specialist support at the meet ups, so it's easier for people to access the help they need.

We can't thank you enough

Every year hundreds of people, community groups, businesses and schools help create a safe home, better life and fairer future for everyone by supporting our work. The last year has been no exception.

You were there when it mattered most – offering safety, stability and independence for people facing the devastating effects of homelessness, poverty and inequality.

During a period of drastic funding cuts and a devastating cost of living crisis, you saved lives and created hope for the future. Thank you.



Leaving a gift in your Will gives hope to future generations

Each year, lives are saved because kind-hearted people leave us gifts in their Wills.

Thanks to the generosity of supporters like Dianne and David, who both left a gift in their Will to Porchlight, people forced to sleep on the streets now have a home. Those suffering from mental ill-health are getting specialist support. And there's a safety net to help young people to overcome problems they're facing.

To find out more about leaving a gift in your Will, please visit porchlight.org.uk/legacy or call the team on **01227 813199**.



Jon's marathon mission

Running a marathon is a huge commitment, and we're honoured when people like Jon support us by taking part on our behalf.

Jon ran the Manchester Marathon in April.

He says: "I chose to support Porchlight because in my view, society does a bad job of supporting people who are homeless or have housing concerns. Porchlight fills this void and provides practical and emotional support when people need it most. I wanted to increase awareness of their invaluable work among my circle of friends, family and connections."

For a full list of running event and other fundraising activities for Porchlight, visit: porchlight.org.uk/events

London to Brighton cycle ride

Join team Porchlight and take on this scenic 55-mile cycle ride from Clapham Common to Brighton.

You'll travel through the South Downs, taking in amazing views while also raising money for homelessness, poverty and mental ill health.

The ride takes place on Sunday 15 September.

For more information, email events@porchlight.org.uk



Fundraising sleep out by Girlguiding Greater London Kent

In March, 485 guides from Girlguiding Greater London Kent took part in sleep outs and other fundraising activities. They raised over £7,000 for our Bexley hostel for pregnant women and mothers with children.

The money will help us build a meeting space where residents can get support with mental and physical health, money and housing from staff in a secure, confidential environment.

If you'd like to host your own sleep out visit [Porchlight.org.uk/bigsleepout](https://porchlight.org.uk/bigsleepout)



Thanks to our 50th anniversary sponsors:

Barretts of Canterbury, Fitzgerald Jewellers, Leverets – Barristers & Solicitors, Savills and Thanet Earth, who are all generously supporting Porchlight in this landmark year.

For more news from the Porchlight community, follow us on:

   [Porchlight1974](https://porchlight1974)



Support our work Want to support Porchlight? Find out how you, your community group or your company can help by contacting getinvolved@porchlight.org.uk