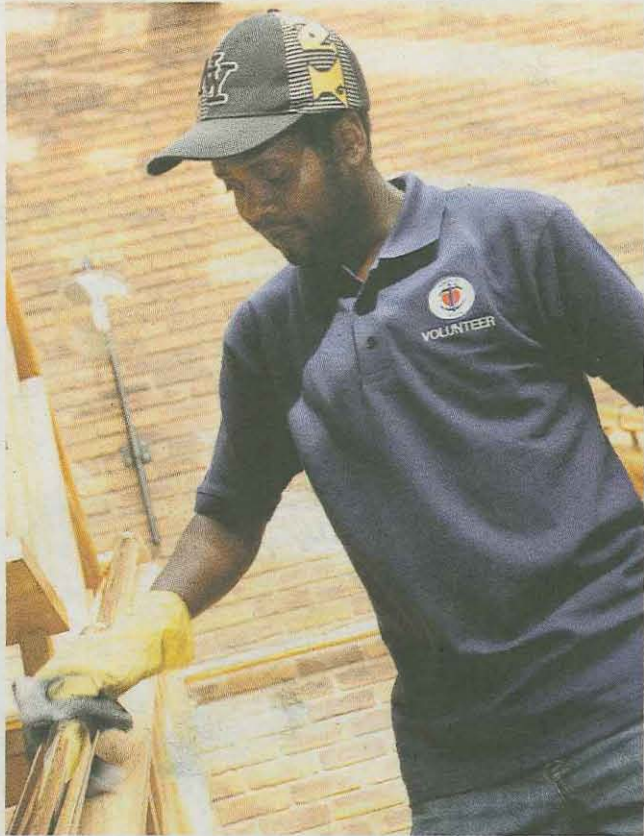


THANKS TO TOP MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES, A FORMER SEAFARERS' FACILITY IN LONDON'S CANNING DOCK

'Can-do' attitude re-creates award-winning hostel



Hands-on approach: Anchor House helps its residents to move towards employment and independent living

By Tara Holmes

TURNING round any failing organisation requires a radical vision and a leader who can inspire change, so when Keith Fernet arrived at the Catholic homeless charity Anchor House just over six years ago, he knew he was facing a tough challenge.

The charity, with its 118-room centre in London's Canning Town, was on the brink of collapse and no longer able to carry out its mission to help homeless and jobless people back to work.

A former director and management consultant with more than two decades' experience in the public sector, Keith remembers sitting down with despondent staff and residents on his first day and announcing it was time to start over.

"We decided on a no-blame culture," he recalls. "I got out a blank sheet of paper and said: 'Right, what are we going to do? What's our vision?'"

"We resolved in five minutes flat what needed to be done and we decided we were going to be the best in London."

With building repairs for the homeless centre estimated at £2.5m, it was an ambitious,

almost impossible, plan.

"We had no staff resources. Like a lot of charities at the time that had done things the traditional way, we were facing problems with changing legislation. We had major financial difficulties, were losing funding and receiving only a sixth of that of other similar charities."

A former hostel for seafarers visiting the ports of east London, Anchor House was originally set up in 1962 to help those who became redundant on arrival at the docks. In the 1980s, as needs changed, the charity started to take in homeless people.

Resource

Situated in one of the most deprived areas of east London, the homeless centre was soon struggling to stay afloat.

"Although Anchor House was set in the docks, it had missed the boat," explains Keith.

"But we still had one resource - our residents."

"Before, residents had been second-class citizens. We started to change the culture. Within 18 months,

the residents had already won an award."

Since then, the charity has won a string of awards, attracted new funding following a successful pitch at a *Dragon's Den*-type scenario and used its proximity to Canary Wharf to forge links with the City.

"Using top management techniques, we had to make sure everything was tightly, tightly managed," reveals Keith.

"When you have few resources, you have to use them effectively. The attitude has to become 'can do'."

Part of the new 'can do' approach was to introduce the business concept of performance management for both staff and residents alike.

"Some don't like it," says Keith, "but most rise to the challenge. We agree a personal development plan. We work with people to set personal aspirations."

There is also a 'pecking order' in place so only clients who have proven themselves can earn privileges, such as access to the bedrooms with the best facilities.

"The pecking order is

determined by the residents themselves and their involvement," stresses Keith. "On day one, we give them a licence with a notice to quit within 28 days unless they do what they've promised."

"They might promise to sort housing benefit, sign on with the doctor or see the nurse. We've only ever shown the door to one young man."

Anchor House now provides sanctuary and personal development programmes for nearly 200 people a year. The in-house aspiration scheme aims to help residents to move into employment and towards independent living.

Clients, mostly aged from 20-40, are drawn from 20 different nationalities and have typically experienced problems such as offending, substance misuse, long-term unemployment or marital breakdown.

A large number of residents arrive in a state of shock, having become homeless for the first time.

Michael, 49, a builder, came to Anchor House after becoming disabled following an accident at work. When his landlord discovered he had become unemployed and could no



Symbol of hope: Anchor House was originally a hostel for sailors who found themselves out of work upon arriving in the ports of east London

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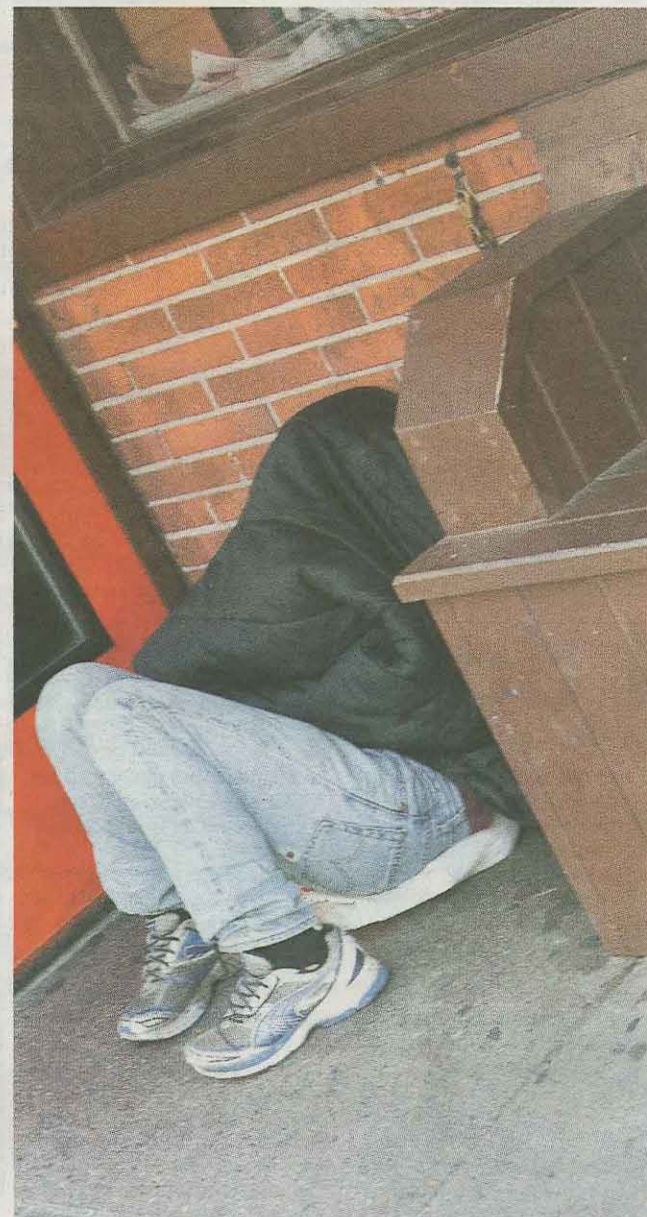
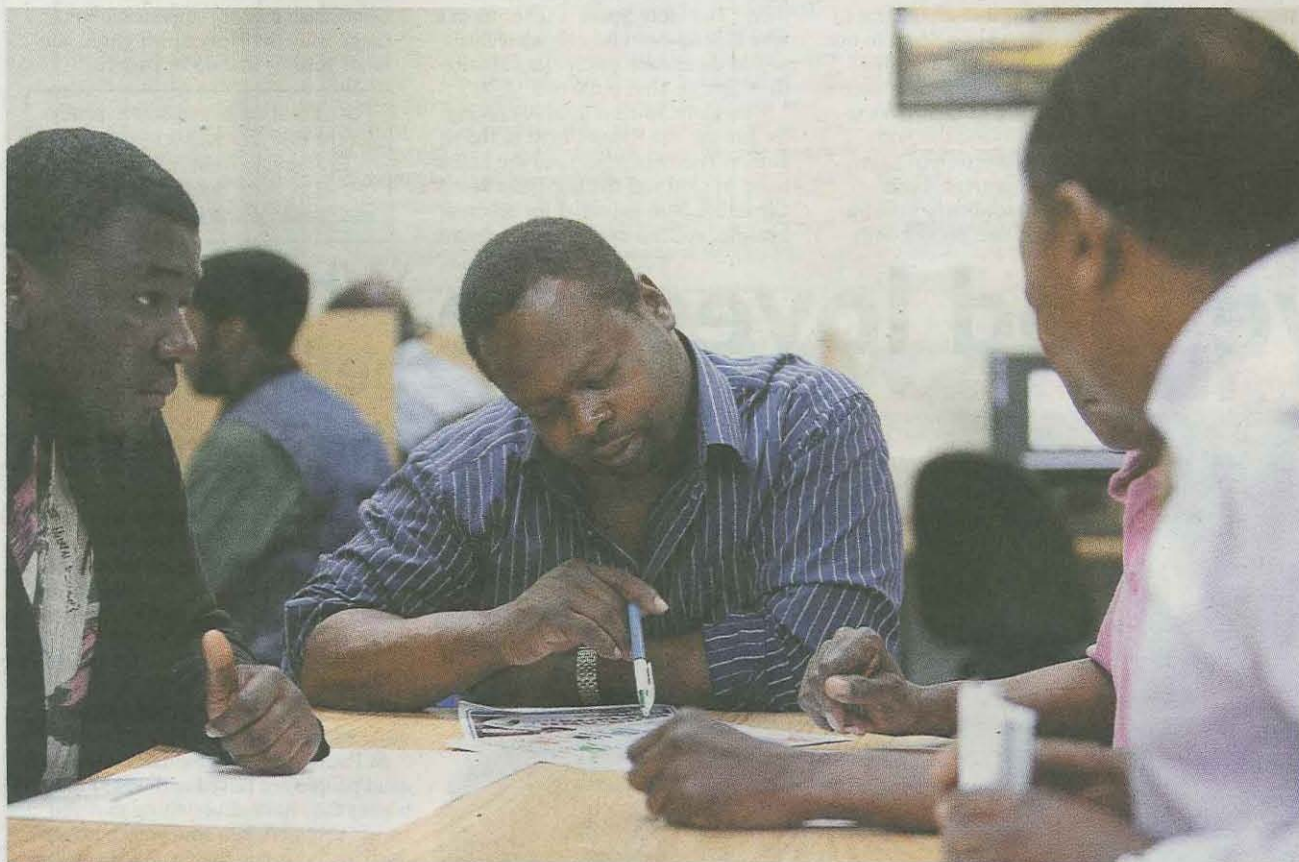
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raises fresh hope for Hostel Anchor House



longer afford to pay the rent, he ordered him to leave within 24 hours. "I couldn't believe I'd ended up in a homeless hostel," reveals Michael. "I've managed to do a lot of things since I've been here, like computer studies and literacy. I've dealt with other personal issues and I've got myself mentally prepared for the next part of my life."

Since arriving at the charity four years ago, Michael has also had knee surgery and is now back on his feet and able to walk without unaided for the first time since the accident. Chishla, 25, was also evicted from her rented accommodation after she was made redundant from her job as a fragrance consultant. A caring friend

advised her to contact the council, which in turn recommended Anchor House. "I've now been here for seven months," she says. "When I came I was lost, depressed and sad. The support I've received has been tremendous." As part of her rehabilitation, Chishla did voluntary work in the hostel's kitchen and has recently completed a degree in law.

Success stories like Michael's and Chishla's make the job of Anchor House's Appeal Director, Guy Insull, simpler. "If you have a compelling story, it makes going after money for funding much easier," he explains. Guy, a former strategic director for a leading confectioners, was drafted in 18 months ago to run the

charity's £9.6m capital appeal. "Over the last year, we've been planning a strategic approach," he explains. "There are two parts to the appeal – the patrons who put their name to it and board members who are well-connected City people and who are prepared to roll their sleeves up and help

us get that money." From pursuing grant making trusts and lottery funding, Guy's own network of contacts through his background in City banking and finance has opened up other avenues, such as corporate giving and donations from wealthy individuals. "We're right on the doorstep of Canary Wharf and trying to make the

most of it," he says. "The money is out there but there's a lot of people going after it." **A question of priorities: Anchor House has its own personal development programme (above left)** **Above: Many residents arrive in a state of shock, having been made homeless for the first time**

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