

Is there such a thing as a Homeless Charity?

The role of relationships!

by Keith Fernett

A few months ago I dwelt upon the challenges facing my organisation, Anchor House, in the light of Pope Benedict's Encyclical Caritas in Veritate: we had decided to go back to basics and, by respecting the sanctity of every individual, we are now coming to terms with our new reality.

young woman. Young mothers bring back their children to show how proud they are. Role models and peer mentoring are becoming a new reality.

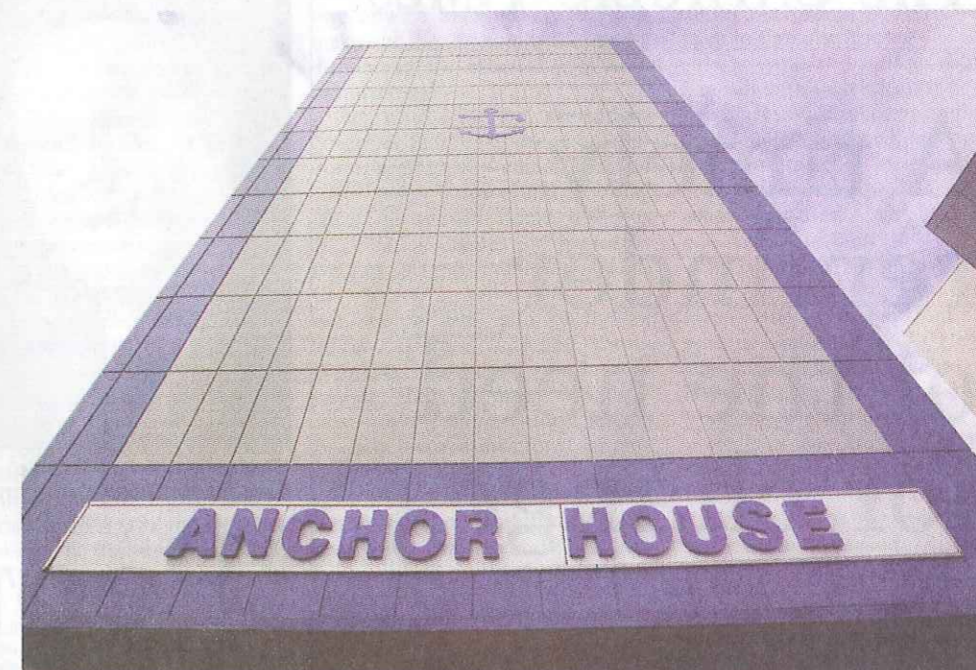
I was talking to a forty-odd year old resident recently about the direction of his life and he described how one of my staff had the mother role to our residents and that I played the

more than the obvious, and get to the heart of the matter.

Why were we in the police cells to ensure that one of our residents got the right treatment?

Why are residents dealt with differently if we turn up at the Job Centre with them?

We have to go through rules and procedures that at times are not



Anchor House



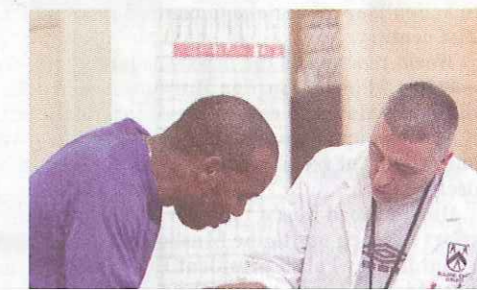
Director Keith Fernett with 4 residents who have been employed by our contractor to rebuild Anchor House

I am not for one moment suggesting that monies be paid over for nothing, on the contrary, we believe that there should be recognition of the fact that benefits are paid for a reason.

One of our residents was offered a retail job by the job centre, the employer then decided to pay in cash, with no payslip. Our resident did the right thing but has subsequently been penalised by the benefits system: we in turn did not receive any rent. The rule books can be hard to cope with at the bottom of society.

Increasingly we are seeing our residents being offered jobs where they have to agree to a pre-work assessment period of unpaid work of sometimes up to a month in length. Their benefits get messed up, they often seem

Why do I believe this is important? Well it is quite simply because, on a daily basis, the strength of my staff's personal relationships makes a difference to their lives. We recently had to separate two residents who had a major disagreement, where chairs were going to be smashed down on heads. Our relationship with our residents saw beyond the major problems of anger, one has now achieved a good job, the other is volunteering and has a positive future.



What does our new father role. This accolade brings... conducive to the dealing of the

reality mean?

In dealing with over a hundred homeless, ostensibly single people, we have gone back to the basics, as I have had to ask myself what is expected of me and my staff. Our residents give us the answer everyday of the week in their dealings with ourselves. We have developed a community where we have the roles of father, mother, brother, sister. Membership of this community is devoted to a common cause, the personal development of our residents so they can obtain jobs, be good citizens and obtain their own housing.

Our community now has a wider membership, that of our former residents coming back to their 'family home'. I never imagined that I would be in a maternity suite on a Sunday when one of my staff was a birth partner for a

with it a need for us to reappraise our relationships and how we relate to everyone; particularly for the staff group as they consider their roles.

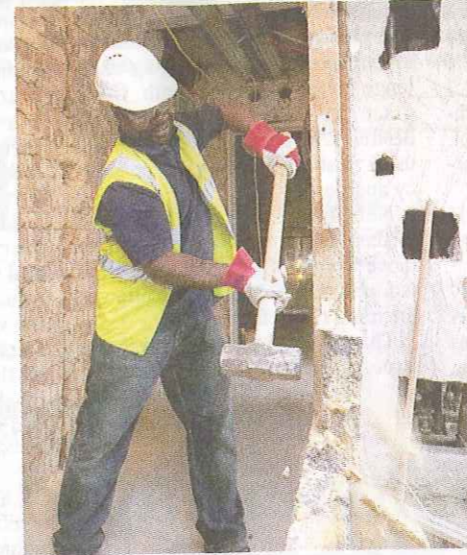
We have to consider how we provide the love of the family setting whilst getting the message of 'tough love' over to our residents. Does this cause us to have a dynamic debate with strongly-held views on both sides? Certainly, but we are united in the role of serving our residents and getting the best for them. Consequently we sometimes have to go to places that we have never envisaged.

Where have we gone?

In dealing with the needs of our residents, my staff have had to bulldoze themselves into doctors surgeries to ensure that the medical profession consider

problems being faced by our residents.

We see the laxness of the rules surrounding Members of Parliament expenses whilst at the same time we see our residents being increasingly put through the hoops about benefits of about £60 per week.



Resident rebuilding Anchor House

others are taken on. Call me a cynic, but though the job market is very problematic, I struggle to see how this type of behaviour is conducive to developing a long-term relationship with the long-term unemployed, who if we are to be believed will be targeted by whatever party comes into power after the next general election.

The relationship between society and our residents needs to be reconsidered. We are placed within a procurement system for training and employability initiatives that determines that such initiatives have to be regional, sub-regional, pan-London: yet our relations are with our residents are on a one to one basis. Is there a place for a new paradigm, from the bottom-up in society, as opposed to prescriptive contracts that rule out individuality and personal relationships?



Building teamwork

Is there a need for a new paradigm? We think so, where would our two residents be if their disagreement had taken place in a job centre, a police station or a doctors' surgery? Prison would be a possibility. Our preventative and personal approach to relations saves society untold thousands per year, is it time for a new preventative bottom-up Paradigm?

For the reality of our relationships please look at our website and view our residents video 'Home and Hope' on www.anchorhouseuk.org

working at the heart of homelessness

Anchor House

Anchor House the Diocesan Homeless Charity looks after 125 residents at any one time, many of whom suffer from mental health problems, drug and alcohol addiction, are ex offenders and have sometimes been workless for over 20 years. The Anchor House Aspirations Programme managed to get 15 people in to jobs in the last quarter. Anchor House has won the Prestigious Michael Whippman Award for two years running, for Service User Involvement and Community Involvement and is now recognised by the Government as a centre of excellence.

Anchor House is working on several national initiatives for the rehabilitation of offenders and has major training initiatives on site.'



Should you want further details about Anchor House please contact Keith Fennett, Director, Anchor House, 81, Barking Road, Canning Town, London E16 4HB. TEL: 0207 476 6062

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£20 £40 £60 £100 or my preferred amount is £

PLEASE WRITE IN BLOCK CAPITALS

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Gift aid declaration (only valid with full name and home address) Please treat all of my donations for the six years prior to this year (but not before the 6th April 2000) and until further notice as GIFT Aid. My UK annual income tax is more than the tax Anchor House will reclaim.

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I enclose: a cheque or postal order (please make cheques payable to Anchor House) OR please debit my Visa MasterCard CharityCard American Express Switch/Maestro

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