

THE WHITWORTH TRUST

Charity no. 1091682

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT, 2019

Over the course of 2019, our little local charity has learned a lot about people power. For alongside our efforts to raise funds to support vulnerable and homeless women in our community, we have had to very firmly and very swiftly add 'campaigning' to our list of activities.

At the beginning of January we became alert to the possibility that Whitworth House, which offers supported residential accommodation for up to 15 young women in our city, might be vulnerable to closure later in the year. As part of the preliminary proposals concerning their strategic review of housing-related support service provision across Cambridgeshire, County Council commissioners were proposing to cut entirely the £65,000 of funding they issue annually to Orwell Housing to run Whitworth House. Orwell explained that since they rely on this funding to staff the service, and to provide a programme of support to its residents, they would be unable to keep the House running without it.

The subsequent campaign to 'save Whitworth House', which the Whitworth Trust was proud to run entirely collaboratively with local charities, agencies, students, members of the press, County Councillors, neighbours, and—most importantly—the residents of Whitworth House themselves, contributed to the decision, taken in late May by the County Council's Children and Young People Committee, to extend funding to the House by 18 months. This decision was also a signal that Whitworth House would now be fully included in the County Council's on-going strategic review of housing-related provision, and that Orwell Housing, alongside other service providers in the city, would be invited to discuss ways to change, adapt and rationalise their existing provision so that it might fit better and more effectively within a much wider network of services.

If at the 2018 AGM and accompanying garden party we were celebrating the 20-year anniversary of Whitworth House and all it has achieved, then this year the central message accompanying our gathering must simply be that Whitworth House continues to need and to merit our support. County Council commissioners have been required to make cuts across numerous services in the light of a much reduced budget. We welcome the work of Council officers to try and improve the existing network, and to strategise with partners to make sure those without homes in Cambridge are protected and given the help they need. But it is widely recognised that at this time, the all-female supported accommodation that Whitworth House provides (it is one of the *very few* women-only hostels in the city, and certainly the largest of its kind) is more important than ever.

We argued in our Open Letter, which was right at the heart of our campaign, that by offering early intervention to a particularly vulnerable group of people, Whitworth House is highly effective at preventing the downward spiral into long-term homelessness. The House equips

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residents for independent living, while also providing a structured and supportive environment that is appropriate to their age and circumstances. It has a high social value that should be taken into account in future questions over its funding. Moreover, for many women facing homelessness, including a number of those who become residents at Whitworth House, their past life experiences make sharing hostel-type accommodation with men a difficult and threatening prospect. We have been keen this year to join our voices to our those of our colleagues at Women's Aid, including Angie Stewart, who have campaigned so long and so hard for better support for female victims of domestic abuse and violence, and to stress that many women in difficult situations do not access support services if they are not women only. We need to safeguard female-only spaces in our city. This last concern is a central one to the Women's Homelessness Action Group (the WHAG), which was established after the important 'It Takes A City' Summit on Homelessness that took place in November 2018. I have attended a number of WHAG meetings this year, and in our Whitworth House campaign have been utterly grateful for the support of members including Chris Jenkin, Jane Dominey, Nicola Padfield and Angie Stewart.

GRANTS TO OUR PARTNER AGENCIES

Cambridge Aid | We announced a grant of £3000 to Cambridge Aid (formerly the Cambridge Central Aid Society) in late 2018, and have just arranged for a further grant of £4000 to be awarded this last month. This money is used by CA to provide emergency grants to vulnerable women. Grants cover individual items such as cots and bedding, second hand furniture, mattresses, fridges, dishwashers, rent deposits, and curtains. Grant applications are considered on an individual basis by CA trustees, who meet weekly.

Jimmy's Cambridge | We granted £3700 to Jimmy's in January 2019. The money was used to help fund two projects: (i) the provision of support for a women-specific shared house, and (ii) the extension of a Controlled Drink Project, which this year would also include a drop in service to support drink dependant females.

CCHP | In December 2018 we granted £500 to the Cambridge Churches Homelessness Project, which was used to provide emergency B&B accommodation for vulnerable women in the city. We have since arranged for a further grant of £1000, to be used to the same end and awarded this last month. The project is also able to host a couple of female guests in churches over the winter, and it is brilliant to see the wonderful work of the project extended in this way.

Cambridge Women's Aid | This month we are delighted to be able to offer Cambridge Women's Aid a grant of £2,000 for the work they do with women and families who are homeless, and specifically those who are the victims of domestic violence and abuse.

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In the past year, the Committee has met on five occasions, has co-organised a large fundraising event, and has hosted an Open Meeting to strategise against the closure of Whitworth House. The chief officers also keep in constant email contact and make news available to supporters via our website, Facebook Page, and, during the campaign to support Whitworth House, through email bulletins. We would warmly welcome the addition of a web officer to our committee, to help with this!

During the last year Sarah Atkins and Mary Ward have joined us as trustees, and we will also be welcoming Elisabeth Kwan and Sharon Williamson to the committee during the AGM. I am very grateful to Jo Wibberley for her long service as Mother's Union Representative and for the renewal of her commitment this year.

I am glad for all that the committee has achieved while I've been involved as Chair, and I am extremely proud to have worked and campaigned alongside such passionate volunteers, friends and colleagues. It is a great loss for the Whitworth Trust that they can no longer benefit from the secretarial nous of Jon Sanders, but we are extremely excited for him as he pursues the next stage of his ministerial training in the Church of England.

It will be important for the executive committee to have a Chairperson in place in the coming months, and I will be in contact with the remaining trustees to ensure a smooth transition from my own Chairship. I am also glad for the support and interest we have from the local student population over the last few months, and the committee would be especially grateful to welcome further volunteers into their midst who have a wide spectrum of community links.

In January of this year, we were informed of the death of Sheila Bly, who was a central figure in the establishment of Whitworth House. As a committee we would like to express our thanks for her life and her work. We would also like to record our immense gratitude to her family, who collected for the Whitworth Trust at her funeral.

CAMPAIGN TO 'SAVE WHITWORTH HOUSE'

Our campaign would have been ineffective without the work of numerous individuals. I must emphasise first of all here that the online petition begun by a resident of the House, Jade Tomlinson, had its very own success and influence: it garnered 46,971 signatures and made front page news in the local press. Jade worked articulately and passionately to express how important Whitworth House is, and her contribution to keeping the service open cannot be overemphasised. In addition to the names I mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this report, we are also grateful to: Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner for writing to the County Council on our behalf; Cllr Ian Manning and Cllr Claire Richards; our Patron, Dr Rowan

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Williams; Stephen Cole and the student organisers behind the Cambridge Homeless Outreach Programme (CHOP); the CUSU women's campaign; Neil Whiteside at Cambridge 105; Alex Spencer at the Cambridge Independent; Joe Cook at Varsity and a number of his student journalist colleagues; Ank Rigelsford and Sarah Martin; Melissa Fielding; the staff of Whitworth House and the senior management team at Orwell Housing, with whom we are very glad to be in on-going partnership and conversation.

CHRISTMAS PARCELS & CHRISTMAS MEAL

As in previous years, the Trust were delighted to provide a small parcel containing festive food and to residents of Whitworth House. The contents of the parcels were chosen and ordered by the staff, while Joye Rosenstiel and I had a fun afternoon placing the presents into large and rather festive looking gift bags. We were also very glad to fund a Christmas lunch for staff and residents at the local pub.

SMALL GRANTS TO RESIDENTS

This year the trust has continued to respond to small grant requests made by individual residents of Whitworth House on an occasional basis, and warmly welcome future applications. In the Spring, we were able to help a resident with a rental deposit for move-on accommodation. We also continue to pay for the WiFi at Whitworth House.

FUNDRAISING

Local group CamCRAG (Cambridge Convoy Refugee Action Group) invited us to be their 'sister charity' for a sponsored sleepout and Winter Fair fundraiser in January 2019. It was brilliant to be involved with such a dynamic group and worthy cause. The final amount raised totalled over £10,000 with £4022.21 of this coming to the Trust.

This year a number of extremely generous individuals and organisations offered to fundraise for us. We have benefitted from bake sales, sponsored bike rides, sponsored walks, Chapel and Church collections and raffles, and we are enormously grateful to each and every person who has given their time and energy over to helping us.

Ruth Jackson Ravenscroft, October 2019