

HOMELESS IN COVID



Who do you see?

Challenging the perceptions of homelessness in the pandemic



Hugh Hill is our Director of Services & Development

A word from Hugh

It's been quite a year and COVID has tested us all in so many ways. There have been challenges, traumas, loss and anxiety but in equal if not greater measure there has been compassion, commitment, creativity and engagement with the people who need our support most.

We were lucky to have so many key partners working with us to make things happen, people donating essential items, cash and their time. I can't begin to express my admiration for the volunteers and staff who stepped into the unknown to make a difference in so many lives. Many of those volunteers and relief staff are now working as permanent staff, brilliant to have you on board.

Unprecedented times, and an unprecedented response from people across Scotland.



Simon Community Scotland have created The Access Hub, a brand new Health, Wellbeing & Home Hub developed in partnership with key agencies across the city

We're delighted to introduce a positive, exciting new venture for Simon Community Scotland in the form of The Access Hub on Argyle Street in Glasgow.

We believe this is a groundbreaking initiative which will reshape the experience and impact for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The Access Hub is a unique space and environment for partners to work collaboratively and purposefully, providing the support needed.

People in need won't have to go 'around the houses', it will be a one stop venue where we'll work together to find solutions

We're promoting smarter joint-working between different partner services, a shared approach to creating new relationships, new ways of working and supporting each other. We have applied psychologically informed concepts to the design and environment and the way in which we connect and interact with people coming through the door.

We'll do what we can to help

We'll be creative and use the expertise that surrounds us to deliver individual, person centred responses to the people we work with. The whole approach is designed to work around the person, their issues, their challenges and their priorities. **Make it easy. Make it right. Make it happen.**

The overarching objectives of **The Access Hub** are:

- Preventing homelessness and eliminating rough sleeping
- Encouraging partnership working
- Taking away the chaos
- Provide healthcare
- Financial inclusion

Simon Community Portrait Concept

by Iain McLean

Idea

To produce portraits of people experiencing homelessness in secure accommodation for the duration of the Covid 19 pandemic. To produce a visual record of the charity's response to Covid through its staff and volunteers.

Locations

Ibis Hotel
Glasgow
Other Simon Community Services

Like most people at the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic it was difficult to make sense of the situation I found myself in, so with all work gone for the foreseeable future it felt like a good time to plan out an idea I'd had for a while.

I contacted a few charities with a view to photographing their staff during this difficult time and fortunately for me Simon Community Scotland came back with a positive reaction. I met with Julie, seemed to get on and discussed what we could do.

It quickly became apparent that the project would have two threads: one looking at people in Glasgow, and surrounding areas, experiencing homelessness and who'd been placed in accommodation; and the other looking at the staff, volunteers and their day to day activities.

For the portraits the client was photographed against a white background to imply a blank canvas. I wanted to remove them from any location or from any pose that would reinforce the stereotype of someone experiencing homelessness.

The portraits were taken in colour with the model allowed to position themselves however they felt comfortable – looking to camera or looking away from camera. They aim to present the model as being empowered but I also wanted them to look human and dignified.

Hands were symbolic of the Covid crisis, with a lot of focus placed on cleanliness of hands due to the spread of the virus through touch. Hands were a metaphor for hope and friendliness, reaching out to show the viewer an item of value in their possession or to display a message of hope – something that helped get them through. Some people had absolutely nothing and drew a message or image on their hand of something they missed or loved, a cherished memory. I wanted to emphasise how few possessions the residents had compared with the abundance of material luxuries many people have in society today.

I found shooting the portraits very demanding. To hear the stories from everyone was profound and eye opening. Sometimes hopeless but more often hopeful. Seeing people with literally nothing was perhaps the saddest part, something I had never thought of and couldn't really imagine how I would react to. I'm lucky enough to have a few safety nets underneath but those without really don't have far to fall when circumstances change for the worst.

It's been a memorable experience meeting all of the people who gave their time and described their lives during our portrait sessions and also meeting all of the superb SCS staff and volunteers. I'm so glad they had faith in me and hope we have produced a valuable document of extraordinary days.



A Mother's Words

“ I can't express how happy I was to receive a copy of the photos of my son. It was so kind of you to go to the trouble of sending them. I was greatly relieved to see him looking both well and well turned out and I must say in good spirits too. I was glad to get your positive observations of my son. Thank you so much for your kindness.”

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Who do you see?

Do you see

the woman whose phone brought her comfort?
What does connection mean to you?

Do you see

the person who found strength in makeup and is
feeling good?

The one who

knew exactly how they want to be represented as they
directed their own photoshoot?

Do you see

the artists, the painters, the poets, the comedians?

Do you see

the people whose faith got them through?

Whose hands

look like hands you have held before?
Maybe they've held the wheel of a racing car?

Which hands

work to weld, which work to protect?

Which hands

say I'm open or I'm ok – or not yet.

Which hands

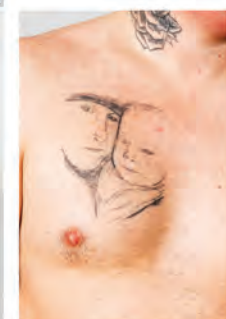
hold each other, the memory of their loved ones,
or hopes for the future?

Which hands

read, “I miss you mum”?

Who do you see

here in this paper, you hold in your hands?





The following story contains references to domestic abuse, sexual assault and substance misuse and may not be suitable for everyone.

Stories gathered by Rosa Alexander

I was a dancer at one time

I entered competitions and was classed as one of the best in the country in the late 80s and early 90s. I was approached by a nightclub called the Hacienda who were looking for top male dancers and I was happy to get involved. I noticed people with tops off, sweat dripping, and their eyes like saucers, it frightened me and kept me away from the drugs of the dance scene. I used to be handed ecstasy all the time but never took it. I was earning £100 a night - it was good money. I still have the scars on my fingers from where I held the glow sticks in the clubs.

Dance was an escape from my life which hadn't been easy. My parents split when I was 3 and my Mum worked long hours in a pub so I rarely saw her. She got remarried to a guy who was a total arsehole. If I tried to protect my sisters I would get battered and he would aim for the skull so that the bruises were hidden by my hair. He ran the house like a prison, everything was immaculate and we weren't allowed to play. I had a hi-fi in my room that I would take apart and put back together as my only toy allowed in the house. I went to stay with my Dad when I was 10 years old - he had money and I used to steal £20 a day off him and buy sweets and cakes to give out to the kids at the school gates - I think I was trying to make friends.

I eventually was put into care and went through 9 different schools - struggling still with my dyslexia. There was a hugely traumatic incident where I was sexually assaulted by four older men when I was 18 - these people were convicted eventually but it changed my life. I began using drugs. I was using

ecstasy and amphetamines regularly and would then use 30ml of methadone to come down off the high - it was still just party drugs for me though and I didn't have a bad habit. Around this time I moved into a hostel and the staff suggested I get a prescription for the methadone I was using to come down at the weekend - I walked into a clinic for this and I left three weeks later with a 200ml methadone habit and 14 daily diazepam. From that point on I was hooked and drugs were the centre of my life - I was like a zombie - I had to give dancing up.

Coming to the hotel has been a big wake up call - I started to question what I really want to do with my life. I broke down one day crying to my worker who told me I could get a space at the new hotel. I was still dabbling with drugs when I arrived and was up and down with my use - I began having panic attacks and sickness, scared of being judged because I am an addict. I thought I might die eventually but I began listening to my body rather than my head. God has given me a gift that I can use to help other people - I am attending NA meetings on Zoom and can meet fellow members for coffees and I'm getting sober. They say eventually the drugs stop working and I think that's true.

Being in this hotel has made me feel so safe - safer than I have felt in my life - I can talk to anyone about anything and I have the confidence to do it. It's been a blessing being here and able to interact with the staff and having the space to be honest with people. The more honest I've been, the more support I have been given.

CB (July 2020)

I came to Edinburgh in January 2020, homeless, depressed, and feeling pretty hopeless, then came COVID-19.

As the weeks became harder and harder with lockdown and social distancing, the depression hit hard. In March 2020 I was approached by Streetwork whilst I was wrapped up in my sleeping bag in the doorway of the Bank of Scotland. We had a good chat and I explained my situation and how I was feeling. That day was the start of a new and better life. It was a Thursday, I remember it well as Streetwork got me a place in a hotel. As the days went by I was put in touch with benefits (Universal credit) and Spittal Street, which helped me with all my medication.

It is now a mid-day of May 2020 and I am on benefits, medication sorted out, gained some new clothes, and also gained some good friends. It has been a testing

time over the last few weeks in many ways such as gaining control of my addictions and managing my mental health way better. Being warm and having a roof over my head has helped massively.

Streetwork have also talked about what I want to happen when this lockdown is over and hopefully I will obtain my own accommodation with supported help. As I think back I feel that Streetwork have saved my life as they have given me hope and faith in the world, which on that day they approached me was looking really bleak.

Thank you all at Streetwork for giving me that lift I needed, that faith in humanity.

*Thank you
G.M.*

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

We are so proud of our team, volunteers, partners, donors and service users. Together we have achieved so much more than we could have imagined within five months...here are some of our stories.

Callum Stewart is a Support Worker at one of our North Lanarkshire services. "Initially I started with the Simon Community as an Activity Volunteer – this was about getting to know people. I then took a relief position and was learning from the experienced staff on the job.

There were big organisational changes during lockdown, changes which really helped me to find my feet. My role went from just focusing on building relationships to more about managing service users.

I have been involved in 3 overdoses – and saved those 3 service users lives. I feel like this is my job and wouldn't want to big myself up. In fact it's a privilege that I was given training to do this. If I wasn't trained on Naloxone then this would have most certainly been 3 deaths.

My highlight has to be the team that I was accepted into. They gave me the confidence to ask for support and learn how to do things. The whole teamwork within the service made me feel confident as I always had that back up."



Thanks to our staff, volunteers, partners and donors, here's what we achieved in LOCKDOWN...



over **2,500** people supported

those supported aged **16-84**

14 days after lockdown **rough sleeping was virtually eradicated** from Glasgow and Edinburgh

provided over **156,000** meals

Local restaurants, church groups, colleges and charities donated food and meals to ensure no one had to put themselves at risk to go out and get food.

supported **300** people in next step to transform their lives

#GiveHope appeal raised over **£135,000**

#GiveHope #LockdownLegends

Simon Community Scotland is the largest provider of homeless services in Scotland

RSVP is our Rough Sleepers and Vulnerable People Team based in Glasgow

A guiding light during the pandemic

Illustration: John Watson, Street Team

The Team is made up of a dedicated Street and Street Cycles Team that cover Glasgow City and outskirts, a Complex Needs Team that work intensively with people across the city and The Hub Team based in our information and advice centre.

Over one weekend these Teams transformed their response to homelessness. In partnership with

GHSCP and the Scottish Government, they swooped in to set up operations in our hotel, making sure the same level of care we offer service users was available during the pandemic in a safe, secure environment.

The RSVP Team has been amazing in the way they've tackled every challenge with resilience while adapting to whatever was asked of them.



Carys and Claire not only volunteered for Simon Community Scotland but also helped each other through the pandemic.

"Needless to say, it's been a tumultuous few months for Claire and I individually, we've experienced a loss of work due to the pandemic, and it's not clear if or when either of us will be able to get back to the jobs we were in in the early part of this year.

Claire's a fiercely positive person with a great work ethic, not much more you can ask for in a co-volunteer!"

Carys, Volunteer

As a new volunteer I wasn't sure how I could help but I was lucky enough to be paired up with an experienced volunteer, Carys, who showed me the ropes. Working alongside Carys has been great, through her experience she creates an incredible sense of calm! She has been kind enough to share her knowledge and given me the confidence to help out the best I can.

Claire, Volunteer



Andrea Middleton was a COVID-19 volunteer

When lockdown happened I put myself forward to volunteer with the Simon Community. I was aware of the charity as it's based close to where I live. I wanted to help out at such a difficult and challenging time. Stay at Home was the message, but what if you don't have a home!?

I was delighted to be accepted onto the volunteering bandwagon and was

enlisted to help out at the Warehouse. From sorting and organising clothing, delivering PPE to residential services, making up food and clothing parcels, helping organise pop up clothes shops at the hotel being used to house service users, to even assisting service users move furniture into their new accommodation. No job was too big or too small! My favourite day was delivering Easter Eggs to the accommodation services, I felt like the real Easter Bunny!

The one thing that shone through to me out of all of this was the Simon Communities staff and the care, commitment and dedication shown to their service users.

Their passion truly inspired me to want to become more involved and help on a permanent basis.

I have just completed my first relief shift as part of the Street Team and I truly loved it. As the rain was bouncing off the ground for most of the 28,280 steps of the day, my spirits were not dampened as we trawled the streets on the look out for a service user who had secured a place in one of the supported accommodation services. As we took her in a taxi to settle in for the night, joining her in a song on the way there, it brought home to me what a huge difference that the organisation makes in the lives of each and every one of its service users and knowing that the job you do is part of that, is truly rewarding!



Being homeless doesn't always mean someone is living on the streets

In Scotland, being homeless could mean someone may well have a place to stay but it's not appropriate, safe or theirs. This can include:

- Staying with friends (sometimes called 'sofa surfing')
- Living in hostels or a bed and breakfast
- Sleeping rough
- Being unsafe and at risk of violence where they live
- Living in overcrowded accommodation or where the conditions may badly affect health
- Having a disability or illness and living where the accommodation is unsuitable

Get informed, challenge myths and help make links

People who are homeless (or at risk of homelessness) often experience stigma, exclusion and low expectations. We want people to be treated with dignity, have self-worth and have the confidence to recover.

Help us make a difference

We're always looking for ways to give more and make life a little better for the people we work with. Your support, large and small, can help us reach more people and go further for those we support every day.

Visit the **Support Us** section on our website to see some of the ways that you can help us create an impact.

Simonscotland.org

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