For supporters of the BBC Radio 4 Christmas Appeal with St Martin-in-the-Fields

Together
Helping homeless and vulnerably housed people

You gave Chrissy a lifeline

It’s weird to say it, but part of me would have rather stayed in prison.

I’d felt really strong throughout my sentence. Like a better person. I’d got off the drugs. I’d got off the methadone. I’d got away from that terrible life. But what was going to happen when I got out? Was I still going to be strong? And where was I going to live? I didn’t sleep, with worry about it all. I didn’t want to go back to square one.

I’m so grateful that you were there, and that St Martin’s was there. So massively grateful. Because you did something really important for me.

I told Sophie, my support worker at The Clink about things. About how I didn’t have anywhere to live. How my mum was too wary of me and I needed to rebuild trust with her. And there was no way I wanted to stay with old acquaintances. Not with all of the drugs and stuff. I’d have been dossing on people’s sofas and floors too. I’d have been one of the ‘hidden homeless’. It would have been chaotic. I needed a better choice – and you helped provide one.

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Introduction from Sam

Feeling that you are together with other people counts for a great deal in this world. When I look through the address book of my mobile phone, for example, I see all kinds of names. Old friends. New acquaintances. The people I love. It’s just one thing in life which gives me a sense of belonging.

Many of the homeless people I meet have a phone just like it. But scroll through their contacts and you can often find a list of failed relationships, fallings out and rejections. The names and numbers may be there, yet there is often nobody to call. It can leave people with nowhere to turn to when they really need help.

A few months ago, you did something quite special. By supporting the BBC Radio 4 Christmas Appeal with St Martin-in-the-Fields, you helped to change the direction of these people’s lives. You reached out to them and offered a way to create new, positive relationships.

I hope this issue of Together, our annual newsletter, gives you some insight into the important role you play for our charity, and can continue to play. By coming together with other kind and like-minded people, you are helping to address one of the most important issues of the day.

Revd Dr Sam Wells
St Martin-in-the-Fields
Timing is everything

Continued from front page

As I was getting ready to leave prison, Sophie told me about the Vicar’s Relief Fund and no, I’d never heard of it. I had no money for a bond on a flat, and while I had work experience lined up I had no way of getting any money together. I really was lost. But Sophie said how this fund, and this place called ‘St Martin’s’ could give me a small grant, to help pay my way. It was a lifeline. A proper lifeline. We had to go for it.

And while it might not seem like a lot of money to some people, when the news came in that they were going to give me a grant of £350 – it changed my life. It really did. Because I was able to find somewhere safe and secure, and it stopped me from taking options that would have been so bad for me. And which could have led me back into old ways.

Now I live with my daughter again. The security I have is so important to us both. Mum and me are growing closer again. It’s great. I’m working and studying and I’m really moving on. I dread to think what might have happened had you not been there, when I was determined to change but unable to do it alone. I can be as cynical as the next person, you know. I’m not sappy. But this has been such a big thing for me. Because timing can be the difference between good and bad, and your help was there when I really needed it. At the right time, you changed my life.

If I could thank you all personally, I would. So, instead, let me say thank you here – and please know how much I mean it.

Thank you.

Photograph by Marksteen Adamson
Who we are

The St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity supports people experiencing homelessness. Your donations directly support people through The Connection at St Martin’s and across the UK through the Vicar’s Relief Fund and the Frontline Network.

We are best known for our BBC Radio 4 Christmas Appeal with St Martin-in-the-Fields, which has been running for over 90 years. In the last two years the Appeal has raised over £6.5 million.

How your money was spent in 2018

- **3,827** VRF grants were awarded
- **5,988** people benefitted from the VRF grants made
- **2,137** individuals received support with their homelessness and housing at The Connection
- **731** people stayed at The Connection’s Emergency Accommodation

How we help

Vicar’s Relief Fund

The VRF (Vicar’s Relief Fund) helps people experiencing homelessness through small-sum, rapid response grants to prevent eviction or access accommodation. Grants are given to individuals across the UK through frontline workers.

We provide grants for:

- **Accessing accommodation** – rent deposits, rent in advance, admin fees, ID, or temporary accommodation costs.
- **Preventing eviction** – rent arrears, service charge arrears, Debt Relief Orders and bankruptcy fees or money to pay for a hoarding clean up to declutter.

St Martin’s Frontline Network

Through the Frontline Network we support workers from the public, statutory and voluntary sectors working on the frontline with those experiencing homelessness. The Frontline Network aims to build relationships, share best practice, develop solutions, and communicate the experience and views of frontline workers.

The Connection at St Martin-in-the-Fields

The Connection is based in central London. It supports people away from the streets through specialist services which include a day and night centre, street outreach teams, help finding employment, as well as specialist mental health and addiction support.
All thanks to you

Our supporters give us something we can rely upon. Our important, life-changing work is only possible because of the support we are given. We’re extremely grateful for that, and to you.

“I was in my early 20s when I first visited St Martin-in-the-Fields. I was amazed at the number and diversity of homeless people, young and old, who had just ‘slipped through the cracks’ in our busy world. I spoke to several people and quickly realised that they’re just like the rest of us, and we all sometimes need a helping hand.

I’ve never forgotten the emotional impact of that day and I’ve given to St Martin’s ever since. Sadly, homelessness seems to be a problem that successive governments don’t seem to see as urgent and year-round support is more necessary now than ever.

It’s good to know that St Martin’s is there.”

Christine, Cheshire

“I first heard about your work through a BBC appeal and it struck a loud chord as an excellent way to try and help homelessness, which I feel particularly concerned about. I was particularly pleased as you seemed to place so much emphasis on rehabilitation into normal life, as well as being situated in the heart of central London where the need is so great. And also, because there is no costly umbrella organisation to upkeep, I felt my money was being used to the best possible advantage.”

Dominic, Leicestershire

“I feel very fortunate to live in a lovely home. It is warm, and cosy in the winter, I feel safe and secure, and I live in a friendly and supportive community. I was also lucky enough to be brought up in a loving and caring family with parents who provided for us, encouraged us to achieve our potential as we set off into the world as adults.

I am aware that so many people have not been so fortunate, so hope my small contribution may help those less fortunate than myself to begin to find their way in life with the support and help of St Martin’s.”

Elizabeth, Tyne and Wear

Your support is the thread that runs through our work. This year, you have helped to provide 3,827 emergency grants to people in crisis.
Always there

Homelessness is an issue that is ever present and ever pressing. Our supporters help us to be there, all year around, for the people who need us most. But we need to do more. Sadly, there are always more people requiring our help than we can provide for.

“Support is important all year round. And in my opinion, the number of people requiring assistance from St Martin-in-the-Fields, and the support it gives to our organisation through schemes like its Vicar’s Relief Fund, is rising month by month.

In my opinion this rise reflects the changes caused by Universal Credit, and landlords are less likely to allow tenants to move in without cash in advance, because they don’t trust the system. We are also finding this with clients who work, because of zero hour contracts or part-time work. Sometimes there aren’t the funds needed to cover rent in advance, as well as basic costs.”

Kathy Hutson, Fife Keyfund
(which helps people at risk of homelessness find private sector accommodation)

“I used to support the Christmas Appeal as the work done was inspiring. Then I realised that the work continues throughout the year, so why not donate all year too?”

GL, Lancaster
“We have become increasingly distressed at the escalating numbers of homeless people on the streets and felt that we needed to offer more regular support. We pass St Martin-in-the-Fields regularly and have been impressed with the quality of the outreach work and practical support it provides.”

Terry and Elaine, London

“At Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust, we have clients with no access to accommodation all year round. We support about two people every week to try and access emergency accommodation from the local authority, 52 weeks of the year. St Martin’s Vicar’s Relief Fund has helped a great many people in need.”

Tom Blood, Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust

“We work housing people from prison or Approved Premises, so our work is all year round. I really do believe lots of my clients would not get housed without the support of St Martin’s Vicar’s Relief Fund and would ultimately end up back in prison. But, with secure housing we are preventing that cycle from happening.”

Andrew Payne, Humankind, Lancashire

“We chose to make a regular donation to the St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity. We know that one of the difficulties which many charities have is budgeting their income. And of course, homelessness is not a seasonal issue. Regrettably it seems to be becoming a perennial fact of life for too many people, and so the charities which work in this sector need more help, all the time.”

Jonathan, Hampshire
‘Whatever it is, we can help’.

There’s a bright red door, just off Trafalgar Square. You can ring the bell all year round, and ask for help. This is The Connection at St Martin’s. And while the washing machines are always on, and the kitchen is always full, it provides homeless people with far more than just a change of clothes or a hot meal.

“I’m proud to work here” says Kai, a warm young man with a broad grin under the peak of his cap, who works as Engagement & Assessment Advisor at The Connection. “I’ve worked for a few homeless charities but this one is special. Everything you’ve always hoped to do, to support people? You can do that here.”

“Someone could have mental health issues, or an injury that needs a nurse. They might need a National Insurance number or a ‘care of’ address, so they can find work. Whatever it is, we can help”.

Earlier this year, a woman called Paula (not her real name) walked into the buzzing, noisy reception and asked for a bed for the night. Yet because of the exceptional, intricate support The Connection provides, staff were able to do a great deal more for her.

She was in her early sixties, well dressed, polite and quietly spoken. It would have been hard to pick her out of a crowd. And when a worker kindly asked her a few things about her life, Paula gave little away. But that’s not unusual. Homelessness comes with stigma and shame attached, so people can keep quiet about what’s really been happening to them. And sadly, in that silence, problems can escalate.
“I’m so glad [Paula] came here for help” says Grace, a student social worker at The Connection. “If she’d just been given a bed, she’d have slept for a night. Food, and she’d have eaten. But by coming here, she found people who could help her emotionally, physically and in a way that would give her her life back”.

Aside from her immediate needs, staff gave Paula the chance to take part in counselling. Over time, they learned about her controlling marriage. How her children had moved overseas and friends had fallen away, too. So, when her husband announced he was leaving, Paula had few people to turn to apart from her elderly mother. But then Paula’s mother passed away, leaving her desperately alone with little help.

Paula’s mother’s house had been rented, not owned. And Paula had no income, or access to money. Life began to falter with a speed that would startle many of us, and Paula ended up sleeping on the streets.

Paula’s support is still ongoing, but already things have significantly improved for her. We’ve helped her find ways to support herself financially, and Paula now has somewhere to live. From this safe and stable place, we can help with the longer term, complicated issues in her life. The support you and others were able to give at Christmas has been a basis for all of this. You’ve made a real difference, so thank you. Because it really counts.

“Someone came in the other day, to say hello”, says Kai. “He’d been helped by The Connection twelve years ago and was now happy, healthy and back on his feet. He wanted us to know how his life had been changed by coming here and to say thank you. It was amazing to hear it”.

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An invitation to you

We’re extremely grateful for the kindness you showed, in support of our BBC Radio 4 Appeal. We’d now like to invite you to become an ongoing part of our work, all year round, by asking you to become a regular supporter of St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity.

Regular gifts really help us to plan for our future, and to make better financial decisions as we move forward. If you feel able to offer this kind of help, you can do so quite easily at www.smitfc.org/donate or by filling in the donation form enclosed (but please know that we are grateful for any support you are able to give, be it a regular gift or otherwise).

“I was living on the streets for seven years, followed by being in various hostels. This was before I was rehoused and my life stabilised. During that period of my life I came across very generous people, who worked at The Connection. Some of them provided moral support and hope, others provided me with small gifts. They somehow seemed to be the very thing that I needed at that moment. I found it odd that my heartfelt gratitude often embarrassed them. I then realised that they saw me as a human being and not just a social parasite. They wanted to help me not because they had to but because they wanted to with no strings attached. I realised that it was not the large things in life that mattered but the small things. That brought a lump to my throat. Thinking about it, it still does.

I am now in a position to help others, so I decided to volunteer at The Connection. This is not in a big life changing way, but in some small way that might help others in a crisis, and hopefully let them know that there are people out there who really do care for and about them”.

Dennis

Changes to our Privacy Notice

We have just updated our Privacy Notice to include more information about how we use personal data for fundraising. As you know, we use personal data to process donations and Gift Aid declarations and to provide you with information about our appeals and other opportunities to support us, which is essential for us to fund the vital services needed to support people away from homelessness. We may also conduct research and analysis to better understand your interests and preferences and help us fundraise more effectively.

To read our updated Privacy Notice in more detail, please visit: smitfc.org/legal
The First Nowell: A Christmas Gala Evening at St Martin-in-the-Fields

For centuries St Martin’s has been known and loved for its beautiful Georgian building in the heart of London, for its inspiring music, enlightened thinking and its work with homeless and vulnerable people. To raise money to continue this work, St Martin’s is hosting a Christmas Gala Evening on Wednesday 4 December, 7-10pm.

The evening begins with a glittering revival of Vaughan William’s “The First Nowell”. This nativity was written specially for St Martin’s in 1958 as part of the effort to raise funds to bring refugee children from post-war Germany to the UK. The nativity will be followed by a Christmas party with celebrity entertainment and a silent auction.

Date: Wednesday 4 December
Time: 7-10pm
Venue: St Martin-in-the-Fields
Ticket: £150
stmartin-in-the-fields.org/gala

A message from Hugh Dennis

Actor and Comedian Hugh Dennis is a long-standing supporter of the BBC Radio 4 Christmas Appeal with St Martin-in-the-Fields. Today, he tells us why he has supported the charity, and the work we do.

“Your support means everything.
Each day, The Connection will open their door in Trafalgar Square, and welcome up to 200 people, supporting people who are either homeless, or vulnerably housed. And in the building just next door, the Vicar’s Relief Fund operates, providing crucial grants to people so they can find a home, or be saved from eviction. These grants go nationwide.

Together, we can support the fantastic work they do, helping people every day. Thank you – your donations make it possible.”
News in brief

An update on the Vicar’s Relief Fund (VRF)

The VRF team are working hard to respond to the high level of applications they receive, on a daily basis. This year 3,827 grants were distributed through 1,569 support workers who had applied on their client’s behalf. The applications represent 967 organisations, right across the UK.

The VRF team are also responding to applications quickly, with 84% of decisions made either the same or next day after submission. On a busy day, the team receive up to 80 applications.

News from the Frontline...

The St Martin’s Frontline Network continues to go from strength to strength. The network supports workers from the public, statutory and voluntary sectors working on the frontline with those experiencing homelessness.

The Annual Frontline Worker survey had 800 responses from frontline workers across the UK, an increase of 23% from the 650 responses in 2017. The annual, anonymous survey provides insight into experiences of frontline workers, increasing our awareness and understanding of current challenges and trends.

Leaving a gift in your Will

Your support is helping to address one of the most important issues of the day. By leaving a gift to St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity, you will be providing invaluable support for future generations of people who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

If you would like to find out more about how to leave a gift in your Will, please contact us. Better still, if you’d like to see how donations are spent, we’d love to meet you.

How to contact the Charity Team

020 7766 5521
info@stmartinscharity.org.uk
www.smitfc.org

Please note occasionally we will use stock photography to protect the identity of people featured in our newsletter.