

## THE CYRENIAN COMMUNITY

In the fifth of our local organisation profiles, Des Ryan gives the background to the community of young homeless people and volunteers living in Broughton Place.

Young homelessness is not a popular cause. Cat and dog homes attract much greater public sympathy and massively larger public donations. Government actions are targeted at clearing them off the street, out of public view, rather than providing long term effective help or taking the fairly simple measures that would ameliorate if not remedy the causes. It is understandable, I suppose. Most are apparently adults, most in the robust health of youth. As with most teenagers there is a mutual antagonism vis-a-vis perceived authority figures. The conclusion most often drawn is that single young people fallen into the homelessness trap are there through their own fecklessness and remain there through laziness. Surely they could help themselves if they really wanted to?

The Edinburgh Cyrenians do believe and act on the basis that most (but not all) homeless young people can help themselves. They want to, given the chance. In our long experience the vast majority of young people caught in the homelessness trap do not want sympathy and charity, they want the opportunity of a home and a job. The sad truth is that without the intervention of a charity such as the Edinburgh Cyrenians most will stand little chance of achieving either.

The Edinburgh Cyrenians were established by local people over 25 years ago. Led by Father Anthony Ross, a Community Home was set up in Broughton Place based on principles of shared respect, tolerance and acceptance. Our purposes, I hope, can be seen in all our various activities, these being:

- \* to create practical opportunities to assist homeless people in overcoming social, economic and educational disadvantage and to become contributing members of the wider community

- \* to provide the assistance, support, friendship and encouragement necessary to use those opportunities.

Activities include the two Community Houses, a small organic farm near Kirknewton, a unique project being developed by former residents to establish a self managing housing co-operative as an alternative to isolated single

tendencies, a subsidised driving lesson scheme, access to training and leisure tasters. Much more is on the planning board at present, both to improve the effectiveness of what we do and to reach a larger number of young people. Unfortunately, to attract the donations to do as much as we'd like to we would have to start taking in cats and dogs.

We would welcome any enquiries for more information or offers of support of any kind. Please contact me, Des Ryan, Edinburgh Cyrenians, 20 Broughton Place, EH1 3RX (556 4971)

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

If you have dates for local events in August, please let us know as soon as possible

**Thursday 14th July** Spurtle meeting at the Bellevue pub in Broughton Street, 8pm.

**Thursday 21st July** Planning meeting for public picnic in Queen Street Gardens, at the Centre, 103 Broughton Street, 7.30pm.

**Every Monday** Open meeting at the Lesbian and Gay Centre, Broughton Street, downstairs, 7.30pm.

**Every Tuesday** Users' meeting at the Centre, 103 Broughton Street, 6pm. New people very welcome.

**Every Wednesday** District Councillor Margaret McGregor, Drummond Community High, 6-7pm.

**Every Saturday** Visitors welcome at Scotland Yard Adventure Centre, in the morning (phone 557 8199 for more information).

### IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR READERS IN BELLEVUE ROAD

This issue of the Broughton Spurtle is being delivered to your door but we can't afford to do that every time.

Look out for the August edition in local centres, shops and pubs.

### TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Come and meet us in the upstairs room at the Bellevue, Broughton Street on Thursday 14th July at 8pm.

THERE NOW FOLLOWS  
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BROADCAST BY THE CON-  
SERVATIVE PARTY.



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# BROUGHTON SPURTLE

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FREE Issue number 6

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## SETBACK FOR CENTRE

The Community Council came up with a reasonable way to develop a community centre for all, building on the achievements of the Unemployed Workers Centre. Local MP, regional councillor and district councillor supported their proposal. But at the Social Work Committee's meeting on 28th June - reason went out the window.

It would be "inappropriate" (said the committee convenor) to discuss the Community Council's proposal until the present users were out of the building. The position was "crystal clear": they had been given plenty of time to go, now they must be removed. When a committee member raised the possibility of selling the building thereafter, the convenor said he still saw the building as a resource of the local community. Sadly, he's letting the bitterness of an old political squabble get in the way of using that local resource!

The centre is still open and thriving with activity, but it is clear that it could be utilised more, particularly by locals of the area. One problem seems to be that many people feel that the Centre is for a specific clique and therefore 'not for them'. Neil, from the Centre spoke to us:

"Yes, we are aware of this image, and are very keen to play it down. Obviously, any place where people are doing voluntary, unwaged work you are going to find unconventional views, but we are always open to new ideas and have no desire to alienate students full-time workers or anyone else. To this end we have moved the time of our weekly Tuesday open meetings to 6pm. There are certain things we won't tolerate here - such as homophobia, sexism and racism, but we are not forcing our opinions down people's throats. And we are not budding politicians looking for the next rung on the ladder to success. Acts of genuine altruism are always treated with suspicion, as are any steps towards autonomy and self-empowerment for the community. We are here to help people in whatever way we can, and we are here to stay."

IF YOU WANT TO HELP DEFEND THE CENTRE,  
PHONE 557 0718



Jimmy Cook interview - See page 3.

## LOCAL RESIDENTS LOBBY ON TRAFFIC

Bellevue and Claremont Residents Association sent a deputation to the Region's Transportation Committee on 27th June. With them went local MP Malcolm Chisholm (himself a Bellevue resident) and ex-councillor Des Loughney (who initiated the local traffic forum).

They argued for the traffic calming measures worked out locally: for a 20mph speed restriction in the area; for a weight restriction on the residential streets; and for pedestrian crossings in West Annandale and Annandale Streets, and between London Street and the Rodney Street lights. "We know we are not alone in being concerned about traffic problems, which many areas suffer from, and no one in our association suffers from the NIMBY syndrome. We support the proposals for East London Street, and will help other areas in their campaigns for traffic calming measures."

Committee chair, Councillor Begg, promised that a report would be brought before the next meeting of the Committee in September. He hoped that the measures would be prioritised by including them in Phase I of Greenways.

The big issue — homelessness



## HOMELESS ON OUR DOORSTEP

Most of us feel uneasy when we see people begging or sleeping in the street, and wish that people were not so desperate in our society. John Major's recent comments that beggars are an eyesore, that people should be encouraged to report them to the police, and that there is no need for anyone to be homeless, were intended to appeal to these feelings. We are being encouraged to turn the feeling that having people begging on our streets is a bad thing, into a feeling that beggars and homeless people are bad themselves and ought to be locked up.

We all know that ten years ago someone begging was a rare sight, and homeless people sleeping in doorways or cardboard boxes were only seen in London. Now it is common everywhere, and the obviously homeless are a small proportion of the total. The many reasons include poverty, unemployment, the withdrawal of benefits from 16 and 17 year olds (incidentally when John Major was social security minister), family breakdown caused by these, and other, things, the legislation that prevents money from council house sales being spent on new housing stock, the vicious circle of 'no address-no social security payment', the inadequate funding of the 'Care in the Community' programme, the lack of support for children leaving official care (two fifths of the young homeless were in care), for young men leaving the armed forces, for those leaving prison.

The list goes on, and you have heard it before, so let's get more personal. There are estimated to be over a hundred people sleeping rough in central Edinburgh every night. If you live in Broughton, there is probably someone trying to sleep outside a minute's walk from where you live. People sleep in back greens, public parks, private gardens, cellars. Those big yellow grit bins are popular. There are also thousands of people in hostels, bed and breakfasts, on friend's floors.

It's not only a matter of finding a place to sleep. Where do you wash, eat, keep your possessions? What do you do all day? Most of us think of our homes as the place we can

relax, be private, do what we want, and escape from some of the stress surrounding us. People with nowhere to go can never relax.

It is not surprising that some people living like this fall into some of the many traps - drink or drugs, for instance, which many people with happier backgrounds find impossible to resist. It is also a very sad fact that the 'East End' of Edinburgh is becoming well known for male prostitution and most of the 'prostitutes' are young, homeless and desperate.

In Broughton there are several organisations trying to help, and we can support them. Everyone has heard of The Big Issue now - their office is in Picardy Place. A local vendor says 'The best thing is finding out that people do care about you after all. People talk to me now, I have got regulars who want to know how I'm getting on..... I am just like anyone else, if someone is good to me I am chuffed.' So don't walk past because you've bought one already, say hello or smile at least. Homeless people lose out on a sense of community - we can help a bit just by being friendly.

Other organisations involved locally are the Cyrenian hostel - see the back page - and the SACRO hostel, both in Broughton Place, and the Unemployed Workers Centre, whose cafe and facilities are used a lot by the homeless.

Homelessness is a huge national problem and there has to be a political solution in the end - we can't solve it even by offering a homeless person somewhere to sleep. But something we can all do is to resist the nasty idea that homelessness is the fault of the homeless, and to show that we are resisting it, by caring about homeless people locally and including them in our community.

Let's make the government think of a more imaginative and less shameful solution than shifting the 'eyesores' out of the tourist spots.

*See the article "The Cyrenian Community" on the back page of this issue.*

THE BROUGHTON SPURTLE aims to:-

- provide a contact point for local people who want to get together and change things
- help local action groups publicise their work
- make connections between "the news" and people's own lives in Broughton
- and generally stir things up a bit!

We'll support people looking for a fair deal, but not protect privilege. We're not connected with any political group or party. And we don't get a grant from anyone.

Contributors to this issue: Des Ryan, Gill Flack, John Dickie, Neil Bateman, Tim Puntis and Tommy Perman.

If you'd like to help write, produce or distribute the BROUGHTON SPURTLE please contact us as soon as possible! We plan to publish about once a month.

**BROUGHTON BOOKS in Broughton Place have agreed to be our "postbox". You can put a letter addressed to us through their letter box at any time.**

**OR PHONE - 556 7928 or 556 0903**

## COUNCILLOR COOK INTERVIEW

*Jimmy Cook is now our regional councillor, following changes in Regional divisions. He's been in local government since 1962, and was Regional Convenor 1986-90.*

### What can a regional councillor do for his area?

In our class-divided society, we are all prisoners of an objective situation which conditions and limits everything that we can do. The councillor working with community groups seeks to defend and improve public services within the context of a choking encirclement of Central Government cuts, restrictions and underfunding. I was active in the campaign to keep public washhouses open, and in the 'Save the Playhouse' campaign. On individuals' problems, I'll take on anything - council housing enquiries, environmental questions. It would be daft to say that's a District Council matter, go away and see someone else on Tuesday.

### What about traffic problems in Broughton?

Traffic calming measures are important throughout Edinburgh. Broughton as a busy part of the city's central area requires measures to combat road deficiencies and prevent accidents. Local groups have to fight for their own areas; they can't consider the council's lack of resources. Each councillor has to fight for his own people, but in a wider context. A pro-public passenger transport policy reversing the debilitating effects of the Transport Act 1985, reintroducing regulation of bus services, and for the first time making provision for integration, would be a welcome package from Central Government - to help local authorities counter the increase in private car journeys. Fewer cars on the streets means fewer accidents, and increased pleasure for pedestrians.

### Should the Centre in Broughton Street stay open?

I feel that the Community Council and local organisations, jointly with the funding body, can reach a mutual agreement for a new Centre. I favour the Social Work Department exploring with the Community Council the retention of a Centre for the broad community - including the unemployed. I hope we can save the Centre under a new banner: the Community Council have the ability to weld different groups together.

### Will you have a surgery in the Broughton area?

I'm not a Broughton councillor, or a Calton councillor - I'm the Calton/Broughton councillor! I need to find a more central location within the core area of the Ward. (Meanwhile his surgery is at 17 London Road, Saturdays at 10.30am.

### Parks for the People

Planning meeting for a public picnic in Queen Street Gardens in August 7.30pm. Thursday 21st July The Centre, 103 Broughton Street

## THE LAW IS AN ASS

On Tuesday 7th June, a decision was made by an Edinburgh sheriff which could have had serious consequences for my child, yet it was not deemed necessary that I should be present. Had I attended court (it was only explained later that I could have), I would not have been allowed to speak. I was never officially informed by the court of his decision, merely told by my solicitor - this is what he has decided, it's now law. I had committed no crime, but had to make a decision 18 months previously to abandon communications with my ex-partner. He has decided to take me to court for access to our child. I feel this treatment is barbaric, even the worst of criminals have the privilege of hearing what is put forward by both legal representatives and why the sheriff has made that particular decision.

It is not necessary to go into detail about the case, but I have lost any faith I previously had in the legal system because of the way we have been treated so far. I feel I had good reasons for opposing access, and was given assurances by my solicitor and every other authority I approached that I would be heard fairly and that my child would be treated with consideration as he is only 3 years old. I was led to believe that no award would be given for interim access as there had been such a long break and that a trial period would be inappropriate. However a motion was put forward for interim access and it was granted. It was explained to me that the sheriff in question is "eccentric", and quite likely the only one who would do this. I was allowed to appeal - but you must appeal to the same sheriff, who naturally upheld his decision.

I am now probably in contempt of court as I have refused to simply hand my child over to someone who is a complete stranger to him. I had been given assurances previously that re-introductions would be supervised by professional people, but in the case of interim access there are no guidelines, it is simply accepted that you just hand the child over.

I know there are hundreds of responsible parents in this situation, and there is nothing we can do to change the law. But perhaps if we publicised the lack of concern for the children and the blatant disregard for the parents' rights, someone might listen. I would like to set up a support group for anyone in this position, and can be contacted at the address below.

Ms Liz Raven  
8/18 Heriothill Terrace  
EH7 4DY

### Local Phone contacts:

Community Council 556 4389  
Community Worker Drummond 556 2651  
Poll tax problems 556 0903  
Vat on fuel 556 6203