

Cardboard City in Stroud

On 7th March 2014 the Marah Trust are organising a sponsored overnight sleep-out event in the grounds of St Laurence Church Stroud that will draw attention to the needs of homeless people and people struggling to maintain a fixed abode in Stroud. Sponsored sleepers will erect their own cover for the night from cardboard and polythene sheeting available on site.

Last year Marah, who support homeless, vulnerable and socially excluded people, provided 6,000 meals through 162 drop-in sessions at an average of 36 visitors per session, our advocacy service provided 342 individual sessions of advice, guidance and support and we gave out 553 emergency food packs (Made up on our behalf by Foodbank and distributed by Marah's advocacy team.). These figures give a clear indication of some of the need in Stroud. In order to continue providing our drop-in sessions with free cooked food in warm and friendly environments with supportive and welcoming volunteers we need to raise in excess of £15,000 this year.

“Marah helps you out with letters and bills, lets you use the phone. They have helped me a lot. They sit down and actually listen to you and I think they do a lot for homeless people. If it wasn't for Marah I would have still been out on the street homeless.” This is a quote from Chris – a client, January 2014.



The Cardboard City in Stroud event will be a great opportunity for people in the Stroud Community to demonstrate their concern for homeless people and for the difficulties that vulnerable and socially excluded people experience in their lives, whilst at the same time supporting Marah financially in its street level entry provision. We are keen to make contact with people who wish to take part in this important communal event.

Registration forms and further information is easily available from Marah by email: office@marah.org.uk or visit the Website: www.marah.org.uk

Paul Summersby 31/01/2014

Note to editors:

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Pictures are available and please see information about the Marah Trust below.

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The Marah Trust

Our History, Marah was founded in 2001 by six members of Stroud Baptist Church to help the growing number of Stroud men and women who are marginalised in society. This work has grown from a client group of twelve to over seventy. Marah now has a team of more than forty volunteers with involvement and support coming from most of Stroud's Churches. We are proud to be one of the key social initiatives supported by Churches Together in Stroud who are putting aside denominational differences and working to fill very apparent gaps in our community's provisions.

Our Organisation, Marah is a Christian charitable organisation committed to improve the quality of life for the most vulnerable and marginalised adults in the Stroud District; those who are excluded from the everyday, positive experiences and opportunities of life due to their circumstances, life history and others' perception of them.

Our purpose is to offer respect, advice, friendship, wholesome food and hope. We reach out to those in need, providing fellowship and support in a non-judgemental, welcoming fashion.

Our vision is to be a key provider of individual support to those with the greatest need in the Stroud District, helping them to improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing, including support that encourages move on from addictions and destructive circumstances. We sign-post our clients to statutory and charitable services, and where these services are unsuitable or unavailable Marah provides on-going support. Working successfully in partnership with other local agencies is important to us in achieving our vision.

Our Service is for people on the margins of society, and includes people who are struggling with:

- **Homelessness** - including street homeless people and those staying with friends
- **'Sofa-surfing'** - sleeping on sofas or floors at several different places
- **Insecure and poor standard accommodation** - including Bed and Breakfast
- **Addictions** - including drugs, alcohol, gambling
- **Recovery from addiction**
- **Mental Health** - People with Mental Health Issues including depression/bi-polar and schizophrenia"
- Being an **ex-offender**
- **Physical health** - from people with disabilities to those with long-term medical conditions: e.g. chronic asthma, heart/vascular disease
- **Isolation/loneliness** - often linked to support needs as above: exclusion from community and lack of confidence
- **Benefit difficulties** – caused by literacy issues, chaotic lifestyle and fear of officialdom
- **Access to work difficulties** – those who need sign-posting to specialist organisations and guidance due to lack of confidence and being unaware of the systems of support available
- **Hunger** – experienced when people are struggling in their lives and an increasing problem due to low income or no income at all

Our response

Cardboard City in Stroud

The Drop-in is and will continue to be Marah's primary access point as an “open-door” service that provides a safe place where adults can meet and talk together and with Marah staff, in a relaxed, welcoming and non-threatening environment, enjoying free wholesome food. The Drop-in is open 3 afternoons a week and staffed by dedicated volunteers supported by the Drop-in Manager. In addition workers from a range of other service providers attend the sessions regularly, providing opportunities for personal support and to enable our guests to achieve changes that will make a difference in their lives, including P3, Turning Point, Gear and Independence Trust

Advocacy is provided by skilled volunteers who are able to provide practical help and support such as form filling for housing applications, benefits and access to work, support with accessing treatment for addictions, representing clients with outside agencies, problem sharing, advice and guidance. The key feature of this service is establishing trust, friendship and a sense of belonging, enabling staff to recognise when clients have a true desire to move on from addiction or circumstances.

Clients receive advocacy support at the Drop-in and also at the Marah office. An appointment system operates at the office, but many clients pop in during the day for advice, to use the phone or computer or just for a reassuring chat.

Emergency food packs for those attending the Drop-in and the Marah office who present with an urgent need.