

# Night moves, 1995 – 1998 ...

**Congratulations to Oxford Homeless Pathways, AKA The Oxford Night Shelter, for continuing to provide much needed accommodation and support to the vulnerable homeless for 25 years, says Losang Brunning**

**A**s a past night worker at the Night Shelter (from 1995 to 1998), and working on the Oxford network since then, I have seen huge changes in the way O'Hanlon House now works with its residents. Not only have you a lovely building with much better facilities, you also work in a much more positive, individual focused way, to get your clients back into the community and into their own sustainable tenancies.

It's great O'Hanlon House has its own move-on facilities in Julian Housing to further support residents into sustaining their own tenancies. O'Hanlon House now has much better links, and working partnerships with the hostels, street services and floating support services, so there is less of the 'revolving door' culture than when I used to work there many years ago.

In the days I worked at the Night Shelter it was still in the old school, with a small office, big hall, three male dormitories and one female dorm. As for the dormitories (it's great they no longer exist) – that was the work station staff most disliked. To have to make up to 50 beds and clean the bathrooms, and to get residents out of the beds when they did not want to get up at 7am, demanded a lot of skill, humour, and tenacity – as well as the ability to suddenly go deaf at some of the language.

As I mentioned earlier, there was still a 'revolving door' culture, where a resident was referred on to a hostel like Simon House or English Churches House, and a lot of them would end up back at the shelter a few weeks down the line. Only a limited amount of work could be done with residents in those days, and not the intensive work that now goes into supporting them.

In those days the street drinker clients outweighed the drug users and people with mental health issues, and the Night Shelter being a 'dry house' made it a competition for the residents to smuggle alcohol into the building, and for the staff to stop alcohol coming into the building, or finding it once it was in the building. Alas! most of the old street drinkers I knew have passed on, but what great characters they all were, and the stories they could tell!

I could never write this without praising Mr Paddy O'Hanlon for giving me that chance, where I had the hardest, the funniest, and the steepest learning curve, not only around homelessness but about myself. I learnt not to be judgemental, to take each person as they come, and if you take the time to speak to them, behind every person there is story of how they got to where there are.

I had the best three years of employment, with as great a bunch of colleagues as anyone could wish for.

I wish Oxford Homeless Pathways another 25 years (if not more) of great work for the homeless and vulnerable in our city.

Losang Brunning  
Team Manager  
Connection



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# ... and a day in the life of a resettlement worker, 2011

**M**y day starts at 8am, when I come in to attend the handover between the night and the day shift and find out what's new in O'Hanlon House. I read the diary (an OHH institution!), and find out what's been happening in the last 24 hours and which clients have appointments today. I try to have a quick chat with anyone who has booked in for the first time last night, as this can be a scary time for people and they may be feeling vulnerable, or there may be immediate health or risk concerns. Then I read my emails and check client notes – and I'm ready to start the day!

At 9am I take John over to Luther Street medical practice and find out important news – his alcohol consumption is so heavy he is facing serious health problems and needs to start working towards a planned detox. Myself, the doctor and John draw up a plan and, although visibly shaken, John feels confident he can do it.

By 10am I'm back at O'Hanlon House meeting a new client, getting to know them and working on a support plan. These are all on computer now, which has made our work much more accountable and efficient. The new client is Bob, a 42-year-old man with mental health issues and a small dog, who has been rough sleeping for two months and urgently needs treatment for his feet.

At 11.30am I meet with Sarah, our Training, Education and Activities Co-ordinator, and one of my clients, Jane. Jane has been in the care system and is only 20 years old, lacks confidence and

feels nervous and anxious most of the time. We try and discover something that Jane likes to do, on which we can build to bring her out of herself. Jane admits she used to like swimming but hasn't been for years, so I arrange for a female member of staff to go with Jane to buy a swimsuit and take her to Summertown swimming pool.

At 12.30pm I grab lunch at O'Hanlon House – jacket potatoes – and sit in the Hall chatting to clients about how their day is going. It's lively today, with the sound of the music group in the activities room providing a backdrop!

**We run through each client who has stayed that week and what the progress is**

At 1pm it's time for our resettlement team meeting and we briefly run through what meetings we're attending that week with other agencies and note that we have a case conference for a complex and challenging client pencilled in for Thursday. We also run through each client who has stayed that week and what the progress is, and allocate new clients to resettlement workers to start work on support plans. Sarah tells us what she's got on this week – including running a course on first aid and a volunteer coming in to teach English as a foreign language, plus we're starting up a stall on

the Farmers' Market to sell some T-shirts and bags a group of residents have designed and created.

One of my clients has an interview at Julian Housing at 2.30pm so I check that he's ready and got bus fare to get up to Cowley Road. He has and he's very happy to be making the next part of the journey into settled accommodation.

At 3pm I catch up with Jane again in the Hall: she's been swimming and had a great time! I arrange to meet up with her again later in the week to go through her support plan and look at housing options.

By 3.30pm I realise I've got a mound of paperwork to do so I head upstairs to start inputting support plans and client notes, and looking at referrals I need to make. Nowadays there is a considerable amount of paperwork to be done, and it's best to keep on top of it or it becomes a mountain!

Lucy, Laurent and Tina  
Resettlement team

