



Welcome

to the first of a twice yearly Passing the Baton newsletter. I hope you will enjoy reading it. Our aim is to keep you up to date with what is happening with

Passing the Baton and let you know where you may be able to help.

Passing the Baton is a Bethany Christian Trust project that aims to prevent homelessness.

We do this by helping formerly homeless or vulnerable people to settle into their communities. The service is coordinated by trained staff and delivered by the people that we believe can really make the difference – the people in our communities.

In this edition we have a 'Special Feature' on Morningside Baptist Church and one of the 'Members' (service users) they have worked with. This feature gives a good picture of how Passing the Baton operates on the ground. It shows how having the right kind of support and relationships provides foundations for individuals to build on. This allows people to move on towards fulfilling their potential.

I hope this newsletter will inspire you about how you and/or your church could get involved with Passing the Baton to make a difference in your local community. Please call me to find out how we can work together in your area.

Gavin Lawson, Lead Facilitator
t. 0131 625 5318

Member's Profile

Hi, my name is

Sid Stewart. I am

a 37 year old single man from Aberdeen and I am the oldest of 3 brothers. For some

reason, I have always struggled to settle in any one place or in any one Job. In 1990 I began to drink a lot and then started using drugs such as ecstasy, speed and cannabis. It really took over my life until eventually in about 2005 I



became completely dependant on them to the point that I was unable to hold a job down. I got into debt and eventually got evicted from my tenancy, which was actually for the second time.

I moved in with a friend and on one occasion when I was very drunk, someone injected me with heroin and I overdosed. I narrowly missed serious illness, possibly even death and it gave me a real fright. I decided enough was enough and that I just had to get away from it all. I got on a train for Edinburgh with the hope that I could start a new healthy life for myself...

... I presented as homeless to the Council and eventually got a place in the Bethany Hostel, Bethany House. I stayed there for about 6 months and then moved on into a Bethany Supported flat for about another 6 months. I was doing well, keeping sober and I had become a regular at Abbeyhill Baptist Church. I even got a voluntary job with an organisation called Fresh Start doing Portable Appliance Testing. When I felt it was time to move out of Supported Accommodation, I started bidding for a Council house. When I got offered my flat in one of the 'High Risers' in Craigmillar, I knew the flat wasn't in the best of conditions or in the best area, but I decided to take it.

Craigmillar was an area I didn't know very well and I didn't know anyone who stayed there. I had heard about Passing the Baton and how they can help people settle into new areas and I decided to refer myself to them.

My name is Edwin Backler; I'm what is known as a Volunteer Community Representative.

I coordinate a small team of volunteers from my church to support individuals who are referred to us through Passing the Baton.

I have been working with Sid for about 7 months now. Doing the initial assessment at the start, I could see that he was a man who was serious about making some changes in his life. I could also see there were a few obstacles in his way to achieving his aspirations, so working together we developed an 'action plan' to tackle them one by one. This included things like, meeting up with Sid now again for a coffee, looking at what his hopes and aspirations for the future were and ensuring Sid was able to

get registered locally with a Doctor and a Dentist. As a church, we also put on a few social events for Sid and some of the other Passing the Baton 'members'. Social events help people to feel wanted and that they belong, which is a vital part of what Passing the Baton does. Another vital part of the service is the 'DIY Hit Squads' and it didn't take much to see that the flat Sid was occupying was in desperate need of some painting and decorating. I requested the help of the 'DIY Hit Squad'.

My name is Roger Hassall and I head up the Morningside Baptist Church DIY 'Hit Squad' team.

Ideally a 'Hit Squad' is made up of the 'member' whose premises we are painting, other 'members' and volunteers and myself and some volunteers from our church. This mixture of people not only gives us a great opportunity to build relationships together, but also to learn from each other. Through the 4 or 5 weeks that we normally take to bring a flat up to scratch, we can learn a great deal about each other and from each other. One thing we do insist on is that the 'member' whose flat we are working in always works with us. This helps them learn new skills and develop all-important supportive relationships.

Edwin asked my team to take on Sid's flat in Craigmillar. I went with Edwin to view the flat and could see it really needed some decorating.

I co-ordinated the team and together with Sid we went to work. We worked on Sid's flat for about 5 weeks and although it was hard graft at times, it was

very rewarding and satisfying. It's easy to have conversations when they happen around an activity, and it's surprising the kind of things we talk about.

All the Passing the Baton 'members' I have worked with have been great and have incredible life experiences to share. When we finished Sid's flat, he actually went on to help us paint and decorate someone else's flat and that's what the spirit of Passing the Baton is all about.

Our challenges are getting good reliable volunteers. I think people often don't volunteer because they think they don't have the skills, when in fact they do. Volunteers don't have to be professional tradesman or social workers, they just

need to be people that genuinely care, take on board the training from Bethany and work with the people without any hidden agendas – keeping it simple is often the key.

Passing the Baton really makes all the difference, as Sid explains:

"I am currently on a 6 month contract in paid work, have done a talk at the Scottish Parliament, told my story at a church, grown hugely in confidence and I can say for the first time I feel settled. Not only that, I have very real hope for the future, which for me will involve being in permanent work and helping other people".

Progress Report

Passing the Baton began as a pilot in January 2005. It has proven so successful at stopping people becoming homeless that Bethany has employed a full-time Lead Facilitator to develop it across Scotland.

To date, it has worked with thirty individuals in Edinburgh, only one of which has experienced a resettlement breakdown. Given that on average one third of people who have been homeless lose their homes again within 6 months, this is an amazing figure.

Three former 'members' of the service have gone on to become Volunteer Community Representatives, giving their expertise to develop the project and help others.

Two of these volunteers, Dougie Paterson and Eddie Klimek have been

awarded certificates at the Edinburgh Neighbourhood Volunteering Awards 2008 for their contribution to society.

Passing the Baton now has a regular Quiz Night, run in partnership with Casselbank Free Church and Buccleuch Free Church. The Chess Society meets every two weeks. All activities are designed to help formerly homeless people make new friends, develop new skills and are open to members and non-members.

In March 2008, Passing the Baton launched in Aberdeen. It currently has one Volunteer Community Representative, Douglas Hutcheon from Crown Terrace Baptist Church. Additional volunteers are being recruited to expand the project, take on more 'members' and develop Hit Squads and social events.

By the end of 2008, Bethany plans to provide community support for survivors of homelessness and those at risk of becoming homeless in Fife, West Lothian and Dumfries & Galloway through Passing the Baton.

How you can help

We are still looking for:

- Church partnerships and volunteers to help further expand the service in:
Edinburgh
Aberdeen
- Opportunities to start up projects with communities in **Fife, West Lothian and Dumfries & Galloway**. Please get in contact if you would like to learn more about developing the service in your area.
- People who would like to impact their community in a significant and lasting way, but perhaps lack the skills and structure through which to do it. We can help you achieve this.

If you would like to find out more, or would like to see Passing the Baton in your area, please call Gavin Lawson on 0131 625 5318.

Thank you to everyone who has supported this project by becoming a volunteer, giving financially, praying, helping to put on social events and/or being part of our 'Hit Squads'. You are making a significant and lasting difference in the lives of people who have survived homelessness and are resettling and those who have been identified as at risk of falling into homelessness. We are extremely grateful.

We want to see lives transformed, communities revitalised, homelessness eradicated and all of this done in a way that demonstrates Christian Love in Action.