



# Change for the better

Welcare's work was recognised with the award of a £370,000 grant in May from the £100 million Transition Fund, which is part of the Big Lottery Fund. The Fund was open to charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises to help them to change how they operate so that they can prosper despite cuts in public service funding.

## What is the Transition Funding for?

Welcare could apply to the fund because we have at least 50 per cent of income dedicated to delivering front line services, at least 60 per cent of income from tax payer funded sources and were expecting to have a reduction of 30 per cent of income during April 2011 to March 2012.

In fact 98 per cent of our expenditure is dedicated to front line services. The size of the award shows how our services are rated, as well as the Funder's confidence in our potential to develop these into attractive and effective packages which will appeal to those responsible for commissioning services in the future.

## What are we doing with the money?

The funds must be used by March 2012 and for changes which help us to identify and take advantage of the new opportunities presented by policy changes. Our first step, therefore, is to look both at ourselves and the market that we serve: to analyse what we do, what we offer and how we operate and also look closely at how local authorities and others who currently pay for Welcare's services are planning to adapt to these changes. To do this we brought in experts from the Cass Centre for Charity Effectiveness (Cass CCE) to conduct a strategic review.

## How was the strategic review carried out?

Two consultants interviewed a series of people we deal with, ranging from those that commission our services to our connections in the church to see how we were viewed by the outside world. At the same time they also talked to staff and volunteers so that they could understand what we do and how we achieve results. The overall objective was to understand where income is generated with a view to reducing our dependency on local authority funding. Other ways of doing business, for example operating some of our services under the umbrella of a social enterprise model, were considered.

## What were the results?

A full report of the experts' findings and recommendations is currently being considered. It is very clear that Welcare and its services are highly valued and widely recognised, that the organisation's close relationship with the church is key and its relationship with local parishes and communities crucial to its success. Volunteers were recognised as making a significant contribution to helping it to achieve its goals and this role will no doubt grow in the future.

## The next steps?

Over the next few months we will be seeing what we can do differently and how we can do things better, improving systems and organisation. At the same time we will be looking at how we can present our services to different audiences, packaging them differently and creating new services to meet future needs. We will also look at how we can work with partners so that we can together build on our strengths. Marketing, funding and general communications and structures will also come under the spotlight.

## CEO's comments

Says Anne-Marie Garton: "This review of our services will enable us to move forward with a refreshed vision. We are at a pivotal point in our development - the changes we must make are about being fit for purpose in the very different environment now confronting us. If we ensure that we are ready for the future it will present us with some very exciting opportunities. We know that we make a real difference to people's lives and we must be sure that we communicate that clearly."



## Harvest is a Hit

We have had an excellent response to the annual appeal for donations of food to the families who need it most. Our centres are more than grateful for the generosity of the churches who contribute. We are also grateful to the many volunteers who have patiently sorted and stored the goods we have received. This year supplies of food have been supplemented by toiletries which can also be outside the budget of the poorest.

### The Lord's Larder

The need for "emergency" food is actually there all the year round. One Welcare centre, in Greenwich, is well placed to meet this need, thanks to an innovative scheme inspired by St Mary the Virgin Church, Welling. The scheme is simple and effective – the congregation is invited to donate each time they purchase a product on a "buy one get one free" basis. The beauty of this method of giving is that it enables even people on a low income to help, as it costs them nothing to share what they have with others.

The idea, now known as "The Lord's Larder," came from the Reverend Kim Aston who had done a lot of work with the homeless at another church in Addington back in the 1990's. She says that the idea just "popped into my head" and that this regular giving of food, household products and toiletries is really making a difference.



*Rev Kim Aston with Seval Tahsin*

### Regularity key to success

Greenwich Manager Seval Tahsin agrees that regularity is the key to its success and says that it has now begun to be relied upon by some of the people who come into the centre for the groups and classes it runs. She says that baby food - jars, tins or packets – is always popular.

Receiving food and household items in fact means more than the value of the goods themselves - it can really help someone turn their life around. Welcare Manager Seval Tahsin says that one recipient, a woman who had had her benefits cut and her children taken into care, appreciated not just the practical help but the fact that the gift showed that people did care about her and her family. To receive a helping hand from people she didn't know helped her build her own sense of self worth and complemented the work being done in counseling. Over time she went from strength to strength, her children were returned to her care, and she is now herself able to contribute to the Lord's Larder scheme.

The concept could be rolled out over other churches and perhaps businesses, offices and other organisations. Why not? Welcare is a Christian organisation but any faith or non faith group can share in this effective but non-intrusive way of helping others.

## Mary's Story

When Mary (not her real name) was referred to Welcare her family was in danger of falling apart. Her children were breaking all the rules and their behaviour was out of control because Mary simply didn't have the confidence in herself to parent them properly. They also had problems at school and everyone involved was very worried about their future.

Mary took part in a Strengthening Families Programme and received counseling from a volunteer counselor. Now, both Children's Services and teachers are impressed with the difference that has been made. Mary has been described as being "beyond recognition". She is now confident with her children and sets and sticks to boundaries, enjoying spending quality time with them. There is a consensus amongst the professionals who know the family that she is addressing her difficulties effectively, seeking help from them when she needs it.

## Wandsworth Moves On

At the end of August, the Welcare in Wandsworth centre moved to new premises. Welcare had been in the old infants' school in Trinity Road for 16 years and it had served thousands of families over the years, but the cost of the necessary refurbishment was prohibitive. The staff are now settled in to The Chapel, Royal Victoria Patriotic Building, John Archer Way, London SW18 3SX.

# Parents in conflict

*Our Centre Manager at Croydon, Nickie Holland, talks to the Editor about Welcare services for separating parents.*

A recently published review on family justice makes recommendations which are aimed at putting children at the heart of a new Family Justice System. This puts the Separated Parents Information Programme (SPIP) and the Contact Centre service run by Welcare Croydon at the forefront of efforts to focus on the best interests of children.

The SPIP service, launched by Welcare in December 2009, is a four hour course for parents referred by the courts. Its objective is to help them to understand the impact that their disputes can have on the lives of their children, so that they will change their behaviour. More than 100 parents have now been through the course and Welcare is now a provider for Croydon, Sutton and Richmond - but what difference can a four hour session realistically make?

## What SPIP can do

Nickie Holland explains: "All the emotion, anger and frustration that parents go through when their relationship breaks down means that they simply don't realise what they are doing to their children. After just two hours into the course you can see a real change on the faces of people taking part as they begin to understand the impact of their behaviour." So what is the course about?

Parents often come in not knowing what to expect. They have been ordered by a judge to attend the programme and their perception is that they are there because they are a "bad parent." They therefore react against this, often sitting with their arms firmly folded, thinking that they don't need to be there. It can take all the skills of qualified facilitators to handle their resistance, anger and frustration.

## Who attends the course?

All those attending the course are in "a high conflict situation". They may have been in dispute for years, going back and forth to court but resolving nothing.

A turning point in the course is a DVD film made by children themselves which traces what happens in the first six months of a split up. Says Nickie: "You should see the look on parents' faces when they recognise themselves in the scenarios on the screen and ask themselves what am I doing?" The course also includes written elements, such as an exercise in which parents are asked to imagine a conversation with their children in 10 years time,

looking at how the children might respond to them then.

The majority of those attending find something that they can use to help them move forward in the future. Unfortunately the course stands alone rather than being part of a complete care package but the Welcare team are quick to refer parents to sources of future support, either from the leaflet they receive that accompanies the course or local knowledge.

## Contact centre

Welcare also has a rolling contract with Croydon council to run supervised contact where it uses eight professional workers backed by an army of volunteers. Children can range in age from a one week old baby in foster care to 16 year olds. Sometimes this means supervised contact on a one to one basis, where a worker must be present and provide a written report. For others it is a question of supported contact where a lot of families are in a room together, overseen by workers and volunteers.

The Welcare centre offers an impartial and neutral base in a safe and friendly environment. It has excellent facilities, including a crèche room, outside space and a play area, plus a family room with a television. As Nickie points out: "You can't just put parent and child in a room and expect them interact for two hours without any resources. Both parent and child can relax if they are doing something and video games and Wii give children a chance to behave normally." The Centre relies on donations of expensive equipment and would be very grateful for any help to raise funds to provide this and time-saving computer notebooks so that reports can be recorded efficiently. At present they are hand written and then typed up - if they were put straight onto computer more families could be helped.

Although the recent civil disturbances in the Croydon area did not affect the Centre directly they illustrate the problems that many of the families Welcare supports are facing. As a result of the media spotlight more people have come forward to volunteer and as Nickie says: "Volunteers are the backbone of our work. We simply couldn't run the contact centre without them. We are receiving more and more referrals because the worsening economic situation leads to the break down of relationships. It is extremely sad but we know that we can really make a difference if we can get in to help before more damage is done."

## Events and Fundraising Round Up

**Welcare in Bromley** raised an impressive £3,000 plus with a sponsored walk in July. The walk, which was about five miles, took place on a lovely sunny day with participants including supporting churches, staff and their children- the youngest supporters being under five!.



Some of the funds raised were used for family activities for those who couldn't afford a holiday away in the summer months. These included outings to local parks and venues like Crystal Palace and

Churchill Gardens in Bromley for picnics and play time.

Bromley works with between 80 and 100 families and just under 200 children and also raised nearly £600 in an October quiz night. Its annual service to celebrate the work of Welcare was held on Monday 21 November at St Peter and St Paul church in Bromley.

Bromley is planning a musical Christmas, including Carol singing in the Glade as well as a Christmas Music afternoon on 4 December which will feature a mandolin as well as traditional music and carols.

**Welcare in East Surrey** staged a series of events from its Redhill centre which offered fun in the sun. These included an art and craft day at Gatton Park. Children collected flower petals, leaves, lavender, seeds and other treasures of nature which they used to make butterflies and other images. Their best designs were then printed onto T shirts.



Around 90 people took a day trip to Godstone Farm for outdoor activities like zip slides and the opportunity to meet and play with animals from pigs to alpacas. As the team said later, it was wonderful to see children who normally

live in cramped accommodation playing freely outside. One of the families on the trip described it as "... the best day out ever."

**Calendar:** Welcare in East Surrey has produced a stylish appointments calendar for 2012. Packed with pictures showing Welcare's work, it makes an excellent gift at £5 - orders to Welcare in East Surrey please: call 01737 780884, email: Redhill.admin@welcare.org or buy from the Redhill Centre Reception, Monday to Friday, 9.30 to 4.00 pm..

**Welcare in Lambeth** took a coach load of families to Littlehampton for a day at the seaside as part of its Generation Link project. In bright sunshine children splashed or swam in the sea, built sandcastles and collected shells. It was a very special day as it was



the first break these families had had for at least two years as benefits are their only income.

A Summer Play Scheme attended by children between the ages of five and nine was also a great success. Children did self portraits and wrote poems "about me" as well taking part in quizzes, discussions about the Romans and Tudors in between football, tennis and racing cars. Comments from the young participants ranged from "I liked everything" to "I want to stay longer," which says it all about how much they enjoyed the scheme.

**Welcare in Greenwich** hosted a summer event which literally brought colour to the lives of the participants. A partnership of four female artists collectively known as "4 colours," who are working with the 2012 games to put on events, staged a special day which was attended by Welcare service users, young and old from the local community, trustees and the Friends of Greenwich.



**Welcare in Richmond** had a very busy Summer programme which catered for 500 children and 355 parents who attended a range of different groups during the summer holidays. The Richmond centre provides a wealth of practical help, such as emergency food bags, clothes and helps service users write grant applications, as well as running a wide range of courses.

Fund raising events have included the Richmond River 10k race on 4 September, which raised more than £1,000 – for further details check [www.bmycharity.com/richmondriverrun](http://www.bmycharity.com/richmondriverrun).