



February 2021

SANCTUARY LONDON



Finding Home. Together.



We're on an Adventure!

10 YEARS IN AND WE'RE ONLY JUST BEGINNING...

Sanctuary is now officially 10 years old. Gil and Darryl have been partnering in their calling to the people of downtown London for nearly 14 years. As a community, we have grown and stretched and changed, and we sense that this will continue to happen.

For almost a year now, we have been basically just trying to survive all of the constant changes related to COVID protocols. A few weeks ago in staff meeting, Tessa, in all her humble wisdom spoke up and said, **"We need to find a way to stop just surviving, and start thriving. We need to get back to creating 'home' with people!"** So right then and there we scheduled a full day for visioning and dreaming together.

There are many great things on the horizon. We are excited about our partnership with WISH (see page 3), and about trying to partner with other agencies to provide housing for people beyond the winter months. We're happy to be teaming up with the City of London, Talbot Street Church, and Impact to offer warming space seven days a week (see page 3). We're exploring what deeper partnership with The Ark Aid could look like. We're actively looking into tiny homes as one solution to affordable housing and working with the city to make this happen. The list continues.

Please take a moment to read more about all this and more on the pages to follow!

-D.R.

More than just survive...

A few weeks ago, Sanctuary lost four friends of the community in the span of 10 days. Fabian was one of those friends. We saw him the day before he passed. He came to pick up lunch on a Monday afternoon. At that time, because of COVID restrictions, we were only able to hand out meals 'to go' at the door. I was at the hot drink station that day. I love that spot because it guarantees me a few moments while I stir their coffee or hot chocolate to check in with each person. It's not much, but at least it is some point of contact.

I knew Fabian wasn't doing well. He was asking about a safe place to stay that night. We talked quickly about the usual options available to him, and he was off. On to the next person.

The next morning we heard that he was taken into police custody that very night and died early in the morning.



People need more than a meal, more than a bed. They need a place to belong, to matter, to be loved and supported.

We are so thankful that since this time the facility at Talbot Street Church has become an official London Warming Center. What this means for Sanctuary is that our Monday and Wednesday meals have been given an exemption, and we are able to have 30 people inside, socially distanced, to eat in out of the cold. This helps contribute to our ability to have deeper engagement with our people.

D.R.



Better Together

GIL CLELLAND

On November 3, nine of us from nine different service organizations that serve the street level population gathered together in an open room at the Ark Aid Mission. What drove us together was the harsh reality of the impending winter months on the most vulnerable of our friends - those sleeping outdoors. Members of the Outreach workers of London (the newly formed OWL group) spoke up and shared some interactions with those by the river. We heard that even the most adventurous and most prepared were asking for a way out. It was too wet and getting too cold. **As a group, we listened then responded: We must act. And we must do so quickly.** We collected a series of statements that became not only the vision of our collective but the drive as well. We would put at the forefront the voices of our people, their needs, their hopes. The nine grew quickly to 18 (or more) agencies. We continued to meet half a day weekly in November, presented our ideas to the city; and, in early December, London's city council voted as a component of their response to support a winter interim solution to homelessness (WISH)! WISH, an idea from a collective of caring workers listening to the needs of their friends, was up and flying.

Much has been written and shared about WISH since those first few days in November. The trailers (with 60 spots for individuals and couples, a common room, and a bathroom); the hiring of over 80 people in less than a month; the amazing donations of items required, food, money, and time from hundreds of Londoners, community groups, and businesses; and the dream for what's next. All of that is amazing! And each is worthy of an article. But I want to focus on how we are better together.

I was there in that first meeting. **All that mattered to us nine people was doing something that could help people we knew by name, by story, by many interactions, to survive and even thrive throughout the winter months.** No one was considering the implications on our own agencies, just on the people we knew. And because of that, we did something none of us could do alone. And now, we cannot look back. We will continue to respond, put our friends first, and work together. We need to.

I have been doing this kind of work in London for 14 years now and I've never experienced anything like this. It's hard to get one other group to partner with you. Most agencies are focused on upholding name brand, reputation, and what separates you from the others (for promotion, funding, and vision purposes). All of that was put aside for the sake of the other.

What might happen in London if we keep thinking like this? That we're better together? That fundraising and brand promotion can take a back seat to the actual needs of the people we love? I don't know yet. But I'm excited that we're on this journey. No turning back...



Original acrylic by Gil Clelland

Together... Or not at all!

TESSA BUCKLEY

One thing that has struck me this year is how we have all been impacted by COVID-19 across the globe. How we have all experienced or been affected by the sense of isolation and loneliness or fear of the unknown. Trying to make sure we have enough to last us through a lockdown, worrying about making it on to the list to be vaccinated, or doubting the intentions of those telling us what's good for us.

All the feelings and fears of the pandemic: living day by day unable to plan for the future, feeling helpless, wondering if things will ever change and seeking some kind of relief, feelings of loneliness, despair, and missing life-giving relationships of friends and family. These things are absolutely normal for our street friends and what they face every day – some have lived in this tension their whole lives.

Before COVID, many of us had managed to create a comfortable, predictable way of life, where we can grow and flourish in our communities, whether within our faith community, our workplaces, our families, and our friends. The meaning of all these things has shifted dramatically over the past year and we are presented with a unique opportunity to be unified through this pandemic although we must all be apart. As the slogan goes “we’re all in this together!”



If we can continue to band together – whatever our status – in this unusual unity we can truly see the perspective of another, particularly those on the margins of our society who lack the safety and comforts of home, who are most affected by this pandemic, an opportunity to empathize that otherwise we may not have been able to have. Going forward, **we can learn to listen to the voices that have been calling out for justice, and be a voice for change for those who will continue to fall through the cracks** as society tries to recover. When we say “we’re all in this together,” let’s remember, if we can’t all go forward together, we can’t go forward at all!

Still Learning.

DARRYL RECKMAN

If you had asked me 10 years ago, I likely would have thought that after ten years of working at Sanctuary, I would have things pretty much figured out and be settled in. Well that is simply not the case. I am still learning and growing and unlearning and relearning every day.

This past week I had the privilege of volunteering for the Out of the Cold Program at the downtown YMCA. They just started opening up for cold-weather-alert days, and are able to provide warm, safe resting spaces for up to 40 people who otherwise may not survive those extra cold nights.

I showed up a few minutes before 8 p.m., was asked to double-mask, and shown a room that I and another first-time volunteer would be "supervising". There were 20 resting spaces in the room. Some cots, a few lounge chairs, and a few spots that were just blankets on the floor. The other volunteer and I looked at each other wide-eyed and shrugged. Less than two minutes later they started bringing people in. Needless to say, I think we were both feeling a little out of our comfort zone.

Unsure about exactly what we were expected to do, we simply started welcoming people and trying to help them settle in for the night. While there were many familiar faces from my experiences at Sanctuary, I was surprised by how many people I didn't know. These were the people who usually sleep rough outside because for whatever reason they cannot get into any of the other shelters, including WISH. Many came in completely exhausted from a long day outside. Some were given dry clothes to wear and a quick bite to eat. Even so, there were a few people I know who didn't show up, which inevitably meant they would still be outside.

At about 9:30 those who weren't already snoring started to settle in. One of our friends, always joking around and full of joy, called me over and asked me to tuck her in. Was she serious, or was this another one of her jokes? I hesitated, trying to decide what to do. Our eyes met, and she pleaded earnestly, "Please?" So I took a chance. I grabbed the blanket on the chair next to her and draped it over her.

"Could you wrap them around my feet? My feet just get so cold at night and they hurt. I move around a lot in my sleep and I have trouble getting the blankets to stay on me." I recalled that it was just yesterday that I had tended to her frost-bitten feet at Sanctuary drop-in, and **it was at that moment that I knew I had made the right decision.** I looked up, and her eyes were already closed. This was a sacred moment.

I have so much left to learn. And I am realizing again that the best learning happens when I set aside my position of power, and put myself in new and uncomfortable situations.



Thank You!

We want to send a huge 'thank you' to all of you who have shown your support for Sanctuary and for the homeless community in London, especially over the last year. You have really kept us going, and we ask that you would continue to journey with us into this exciting time of learning and growing.

As you have already read, there is so much in store for Sanctuary over the next little while. We are dreaming big, and we don't want to stop. We all know COVID has had some extremely challenging impacts, felt the most by people struggling with poverty. If you are one of the people who have actually benefited from the surging housing or stock markets, and **if you are looking for a way to have a meaningful impact on people's lives right here in London, would you consider connecting with one of us** on how you can not only give, but get personally involved in one of our projects? Giving now means we can begin to plan for significant changes and growth in the next few years to come. Help us **DREAM BIG!** -D.R.

