

## What are you seeing? What do you want to see?

These were questions posed by Rev. Ian Rutherford from Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network at the November 2020 open networking meeting and AGM. Around 40 participants were reminded of the words of Isaiah where we are explicitly told what is required of us. We have the assurance that:

“The LORD will guide you always..... you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings” (*Isaiah 58;11-12*)

Of deep concern to those present was evidence of the homeless crisis all around us whenever we walk the streets of any town or city and ask how our Church should respond. Ian was very clear that no one sector can solve the problem, it is everyone's issue. The solution requires committed partnerships. In developing a strategy for action Ian suggested we work on the '4Rs' **Reduction** – considering causes and taking appropriate action involving political campaigning. **Respite** – providing safe places, **Recovery** – providing ongoing support, **Reconnection** – enabling people to lead meaningful lives within the community. Ian suggested that generally churches focus more on providing respite, which meets the immediate need for shelter, but we must recognise this is part of a much more complex problem and a holistic vision is required. Ian suggested the possibility of faith groups creating networks of support for vulnerable families. Ian recognised the fact that there are many groups offering compassionate support to vulnerable families and individuals but stated that there is a crying need for systemic change, and we must raise our voices against injustice and suggested that campaigning is key to effecting meaningful change. So where do we begin? Ian suggested we learn harsh lessons from Covid and campaign for an increase in mandatory universal credit, call for an integrated housing policy with a focus on providing more social and affordable housing, which would include an effective homeless prevention strategy, a more integrated health and well-being policy taking account of the need for more sustained mental health support. We should be working on the premise that intervention and recovery leads to prevention. There is also the major issue of those stuck in an unfair and failing structure with no recourse to public funding. People of faith must speak up for those who have no voice in the public arena.

So, what do we see? Constant scapegoating of the 'other' within our society, hostility, inaccurate perceptions largely as a result of fear of the unknown exacerbated by negative and inaccurate reporting of facts. What are we going to say to those who say 'we have to look after our own? On a more positive note we see many people of good will who feel helpless and in need of a good 'steer' (maybe this is where we should be shouting the loudest and reminding ourselves of the gospel imperative) We must share the 'good news stories' Maybe we should be taking more seriously the impact of what Pope Francis is demanding of the followers of Christ.

So, where do we go from here? We are fortunate that we have the freedom to decide.

Anne Peacey