

Press Release Dec 18th 2014



St Petrock's marks it's 20th anniversary this Christmas Eve.

Following years of recession, government spending cuts and an estimated one in six charities closing, it's some achievement that a small, local community project has endured for 20 years. But Exeter's charity for people who are homeless has and St Petrock's will marks it's 20th anniversary this Christmas Eve.

"It hasn't all been plain sailing," admits Mel Hartley, the charity's project manager, "we have had some very challenging financial times when we've been forced to consider the possibility of reducing our services. Fortunately, we've never had to do this as each time we've received very timely, unsolicited, funding donations from the local community, often at the bleakest moment and these have made all the difference. Clearly, we don't rely on this always happening but we are very grateful to have such strong local support". In fact, in 2012/13, 36% of the charity's income came from the local community.

It costs approx. £475,000 a year to run St Petrock's, which as well as it's centre in Cathedral Yard also has teams working in HMP Exeter, with Probation and in the community. Last year, 1,435 people who were homeless, or vulnerably housed, were helped and supported by St Petrock's services, an increase of 34% in 4 years. The charity also supported 864 individuals into accommodation.

St Petrock's charity took its name from the church which was adapted for it's use as a homeless centre in 1994 and has recently signed a further 20 year lease, at minimal cost to the charity, thanks to the Central Parish of Exeter.

While many organisations would celebrate 20 years operation, St Petrock's takes a different view. "We don't feel given the nature of our work that it would be appropriate to celebrate the need for our services," explains Mel, "however, we will be marking the day with a special lunch to our clients on Christmas Eve and the Lord Mayor will be dropping in. We've also been marketing our #20things campaign which is a fun way to mark our 20th year and it offers the opportunity for the wider community to get involved and help us raise awareness, support and funds to help tackle homelessness in our area".

As a small, local charity, St Petrock's strategy of not being dependent solely on government funding seems to have paid off. "Being independent allows us

to adapt our services responsively to meet clients needs and, in turn, this helps us attract funding from other organisations and trusts”, notes Mel.

In the last three years, St Petrock’s has introduced a Private Rented Service which has provided support and accommodation to over 74 clients who had no statutory rights to housing. It also leads on Exeter’s No Second Night Out/Rough Sleeper Service which aims to help people new to homelessness quickly off the streets. In the last year, this service was supported 215 individuals to move off the streets into accommodation and 81% avoided a second night sleeping rough.

In addition to it’s weekday contact and advice service, St Petrock’s centre also offers overnight ‘bedspaces’ to up to 9 rough sleepers per night, during periods of extreme cold weather, as part of Exeter City Council’s Severe Weather Provision protocol.

Just as it has done for 20 years, St Petrock’s centre will be open on Christmas Day and Boxing Day welcoming those without accommodation a place to get warm, be safe and enjoy some festive food and treats. “We’re fortunate to have a dedicated team of volunteers and staff who are willing to run our Christmas service. While it’s normally quite quiet over Christmas, with reduced numbers of clients coming to the centre, this year given the high numbers of clients we’ve been seeing – up to 70 a day – this Christmas could be a lot busier,” says Mel, “but thanks to all the donations we receive leading up to Christmas of food and festive treats there’ll be plenty to go around.”

If you would like to support St Petrock’s please go to www.stpetrocks.org.uk where you will find details of most needed items, how to donate and it’s #20things campaign.

Ends

St Petrock’s is an Exeter-based charity that aims to address the problem of homelessness, particularly single homelessness and has been in operation since 1994. We provide a range of emergency, support and prevention services that are accessible and flexible and can respond rapidly to people in crisis or emergency.