

CANONSGROVE NEWSLETTER

Following our commitment to improve engagement with Trull residents and give a greater understanding of our work we are pleased to bring you the latest news and information from the accommodation project for rough sleepers at Canonsgrove.

BBC Somerset Story

BBC Radio Somerset recently hosted a feature about Canonsgrove and the 'Everyone In' project, which was launched by the Government in March last year. The breakfast show, hosted by Claire Carter, welcomed Jonica Walkinshaw, Head of Housing at YMCA Dulverton Group, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Leader of Somerset West and Taunton Council, and Alastair, a resident who has recently moved into his own accommodation.



Both Jonica and Cllr Smith-Roberts were interviewed about the operation and vision of Canonsgrove. When asked about the training element of our provision, Jonica discussed how well it had been received, saying: "As an organisation YMCA Dulverton Group are working strongly alongside different multi-agencies and believe in giving residents a purpose with a focus on how to move on and create their own independence. "It's really important, when talking about homelessness, we talk about it from an individual's points of view. Every person that touches on our service has their own story and their own challenges and it is important that we understand this. No one will move through a programme within supported provision at the same speed and we need to respect that, alongside adapting our delivery of support to suit the individuals we are working alongside."

Cllr Smith-Roberts discussed the future of the project: "For us at Somerset West and Taunton Council we are looking at all different options for the future of the provision. For me, personally, it doesn't have to be about remaining at the Canonsgrove site in particular, but it is more about continuing the ethos of what we have achieved there, which includes everyone pulling together and offering training collaboratively."

Alastair spoke about his alcohol dependency, his time on the streets and previous hostel experience. BBC reporter, Pippa Rifka, asked Alastair about Canonsgrove and the impact it has had on his life this past year. He answered: "The team here

believed in me and have provided much needed emotional support. For the first time in 10-12 years I have felt like there is a future and I can finally begin to start looking forward rather than looking back”.

Following his stay at Canonsgrove, Alastair now volunteers at Somerset West and Taunton Council and has recently secured his own flat.

Thanks to Pippa, Claire and the team at BBC Somerset for allowing us to share our news and the fantastic success story of Alastair, we truly wish him the best.

Surprise delivery at Canonsgrove



We had a big surprise for the residents at Canonsgrove. The team received a donation of 100 plus jumpers from the parishioners of St Peter and St Paul Church, Bishops Hull.

Every year, the group do "Jumper January" where jumpers are collected and donated to the local community. This year, they donated the jumpers to the residents of Canonsgrove. Among the jumpers, hats and scarves there are a number that have been hand knitted. Local vicar, Phil Hughes and a willing

volunteer kindly delivered the donation. Given current temperatures, they were very well received!

If you would like to make a donation to Canonsgrove, or donate some of your time to support on site, please make contact with us at Canonsgrove@ymca-dg.org and we will come back to you as soon as possible.

Meet the team: Pat - Canonsgrove Manager

My career began when I took a support role in a day centre for adults with learning and mental health disability. I enjoyed the work and progressed to providing adaptations to private and social housing for those with disabilities. This led to an interest in social housing and I took a post as housing officer at Westminster City Council back in the 1980's.

Having trained on the job for a few years I sought the advice of the Director at the time as to the most beneficial way to gain qualifications in the field of housing. He recommended that I studied for a degree in Estate Management, which was the path he had followed. Having gained my degree I had the opportunity to work in West Africa assisting with the creation of a housing scheme that also encompassed the local way of life, intergenerational living.

Upon my return to England, I followed a career in surveying and finalised my qualification as a Chartered Surveyor. Throughout my professional career I have maintained an interest in mental health and I currently hold a voluntary post as a hospital manager for a psychiatric unit.

Some years ago whilst I was working under contract at Somerset County Council, I met through my work, the CEO of YMCA Dulverton Group. The range of services provided by the organisation across Somerset and Devon has grown but the core values have not changed. I was delighted to take on this role where I have been able to utilise my housing experience and my knowledge of mental health together with my background as a facilities and estate manager.

My team and I work tirelessly to support the residents that we have at Canonsgrove and we feel joy when residents are able to progress and successfully secure long term independent housing

Resident Case Study: Jake



Jake (name changed to protect identity) was abused sexually, physically and mentally as a child. He went into care at 14. However, after returning to his family, was quickly called back at the age of just 15. As a care leaver at 16, he was offered and accepted into semi-independent accommodation. Unfortunately, Jake did not have the tools and support to sustain such accommodation, finding himself homeless at 17.

In an effort to support himself, Jake found himself in the company of established criminals and began taking part in criminal activity. As a result, he found himself in prison at the age of 20. Prison and its way of life took its toll on Jake and by the time he was 24 he had developed a heroin addiction.

Looking for a new start, Jake moved to Taunton in 2010. He stayed at Lindley House early in 2017 and transferred to Canonsgrove in March 2020. Jake has worked successfully with the Somerset Drug and Alcohol service, Turning Point, and is now successfully on prescribed medication and is no longer using heroin.

Jake is looking forward to moving into independent accommodation soon and is hoping to put his experience to good use, supporting young people with troubled backgrounds as he continues his journey.

Homelessness, Covid and the future

We updated in January on a directive from Government to “redouble our efforts to ensure that people who sleep rough, who we know are vulnerable to this disease, are kept safe” and that we do everything we can to protect the NHS and help those currently sleeping rough to be accommodated.

This month we received a letter from the Government’s Deputy Director for Rough Sleeping requiring us to be conscious of the very cold weather and to have our “Severe Weather Emergency Protocol” in place. This is a further requirement to do everything we can to accommodate and keep rough sleepers safe, particularly at this time of year. We want to thank the Trull community again for your support for the provision during this time.

An Options Appraisal will be going to SWT’s Scrutiny Committee on 3 March. After this it will be taken to Executive for a decision on the 17 March. This report will set out the future accommodation requirements for homelessness and rough sleepers and provides recommendations on that longer term provision. We want to assure local residents that there has never been any supposition that Canonsgrove would be used as a permanent site and it is only one of a number of options being considered.

We provided the following statement to the Trull Residents Group and to the Parish Council, and hope that this position is clear and allays fears that there is any hidden agenda - “I can give you my assurance that the Council is approaching the Options Appraisal exercise with objectivity and integrity and there is no pre-determination that Canonsgrove is our preferred option.”

We are aware that the current use of the site breaches a very old Section 106 agreement, which the Planning Service had not picked up on. We have thanked the Trull Residents Group for pointing this out and will working with Bridgwater and Taunton College to vary the S106 agreement to bring this back into compliance.

The report to Scrutiny will be available to view on our website when the agenda is published at the end of February.

Further information on the Canonsgrove accommodation project can be found at www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-and-information/ and <https://www.ymca-dg.org/>

We welcome any feedback or further questions on Canonsgrove@ymca-dg.org

Yours



Simon Lewis, Assistant Director,
Somerset West and Taunton Council



Jonica Walkinshaw, Director
YMCA Dulverton Group