

Giving homeless and vulnerable people a helping hand

We've all seen the appalling rise in the number of homeless people sleeping on our streets.

Sometimes we may offer them money, or food, helping in some small way before we carry on with our day.

It's so easy to turn a blind eye to the homelessness tragedy playing out every day on the streets of our towns and cities.

But one inspirational Warwickshire woman refused to turn away. She decided she had to do something to help some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Five years ago Lianne Kirkman set up the Helping Hands Community Project in Leamington Spa when she took over a soup kitchen.

Since then she and a team of volunteers have built it into an organisation that provides a whole host of services for the homeless, vulnerable and victims of domestic abuse.

It's not just a soup kitchen handing out hot and cold meals. There's also a charity shop, and the charity provides access to training, NVQs, food hygiene qualifications, information services and anything that people need in order to build a better life for themselves.

It also provides emergency accommodation for people in dire need and who may be in the middle of a crisis they feel they can't get out of.

I'm delighted to have been appointed a trustee of Helping Hands. I decided to get involved when I noticed the increase in homeless people on the streets of Leamington Spa.

Like many of us, I kept getting homeless people asking me for money and I thought I've got to try to do something to help these people. That's when I heard about Helping Hands and arranged to meet Lianne.

I was impressed by her passion and commitment to grow the charity in order to help as many people as possible. I told her I wanted to get involved. I wanted to help but I wasn't sure how. I became a volunteer and it has been an enormously rewarding experience.

Since being involved it has opened my eyes to the stories and backgrounds that can lead to people becoming homeless. The person we see on the street asking for money is just the tip of the iceberg.

In any community there are people with all sorts of issues that without help and support could very well end up being the next homeless person. The charity's principle therefore is to 'offer a hand up not just a hand out'. Lianne has shaped the organisation around this, to provide help and guidance at all stages to someone experiencing a difficult life journey.

MCS Group has helped by providing volunteers who have given time and energy, and we donated around £35,000 in 2018, which we raised at a variety of events.

Helping Hands gets support from a variety of sources. For example, Greggs the bakers donates huge amounts of food and have been absolutely fantastic. There's a local woman who regularly brings in a big container of soup. It's amazing to see the community coming together to help those less fortunate.

We're always looking for more support from businesses and organisations as well as individuals from the local community.

Helping Hands is all about local people helping local people in need. It gives people the support and opportunities to feel better about themselves, be more active in the community and get back into work.

The charity runs a soup kitchen offering hot food and a listening ear. We like to give a hand up not just a hand out through new skills, experience and qualifications. Our volunteers for our House 2 Home project support clients with goods, from fridges to

furniture, to recently homed and low-income families.

Our Gateway Cafe is enjoying its 1st birthday - come and enjoy coffee and cake to support us to help people find a better future.

<https://www.helpinghandscharity.org.uk>