

Watch This Space

PROJECT PATHFINDER

Chris Peacock Reports on ASLAN's Leap of Faith

It must have been 1990 when the idea of an ASLAN office was first suggested. So why has it taken us fourteen years to actually begin the process of opening our first office and employing our first paid worker?

Well, being a 100% volunteer organisation allows us to make the proud boast that 97% of all funds given to ASLAN directly benefit homeless people. Even the best-run charities with paid workers find it hard to better an 85% spend on direct benefits, and the worst-run can spend as little as 65% on direct benefits.

Given our very low cost base (just £27,000 to provide 10,000 "meals" a year), even a modestly-paid administrator and modestly-equipped office would reduce our spend on direct benefits to a mere 50% of income received. Not an easy sell to donors in an age when many small Christian charities are on the verge of collapse because donors specify that their money must **not** be used to fund administration!

In addition to the major deterrent of cost, there's also the question of internal relationships to consider. We have a very special atmosphere of camaraderie, unity and love amongst our leadership team. Because we're all volunteers, all equals, and all have a tremendous degree of independence (even though, ultimately, we're all hugely dependent

on one another and on God).

It is that sense of dependence on God, that focus on servant leadership that has kept disputes to a minimum and co-operation to a maximum. Even in Christian circles, that is something rare which needs to be treasured. And so we have been very nervous about doing anything to "rock the boat".

But we always promised ourselves that, if ever we felt that the lack of an office was hindering our ability to move forwards in God's service, or damaging the quality of our service to the homeless, we would prayerfully explore the creation of an office.

Well, we reached that point at the end of 2003. Our operation has grown much more complex, now that Advocacy and Visiting (mentoring) have been added to Entertainment Events (social evenings and day trips), The Passage, the Tea Run and Sandwich-Making.

Also, two of our core ministries (Entertainments and Visiting) are victims of their own success, and hugely over-demanded. We desperately need to develop co-operative ventures with other churches and Christian organisations, if lonely and desperate people are not to be turned away.

The Freephone Helpline for the homeless is another dream which will never reach fruition without an office to house it and an ad-

ministrator to man it.

Last, but by no means least, we have a growing number of support mechanisms for our volunteers (publications, best practice guides, training courses and training days) which need underpinning with administrative support.

We recognised that many of these things would be done badly, and some would not be done at all, if we continued to struggle on with an unpaid Project Co-ordinator trying to handle all the administration plus set the vision and tone for ASLAN whilst providing pastoral support for leaders and team members.

After a great deal of discussion and prayer, culminating in our Leaders' Weekend in the spring of 2004, we decided that God was calling us to make that leap of faith and to trust Him to provide the resources for an office and a paid Project Support Manager. So the process was begun in the early summer of 2004.

An office location was quickly identified at the All Souls Clubhouse (which is already the base for most of our operations). Shortly thereafter, the All Souls PCC kindly agreed to fund the rental costs. So work on partitioning the room pictured below has begun to create the ASLAN office.

Fundraising for the Project Support Manager's salary package and office equipment is taking longer to complete, and we really need prayer for the funding to come in within the next three months. That is so the Support Manager can be in post by Spring 2005, and so that all these dreams do not have to be kept on hold much longer (and so that our newly-created office does not stand empty!).

If you would like to help in other practical ways, do visit our website (www.aslan.org.uk), where you can give online, or write to Chris Peacock c/o All Souls Church, 2 All Souls Place, London W1B 3DA.

