



*' Supporting independence from alcohol and tackling homelessness'*

**NEWSLETTER— WINTER 2008/2009**

## **WE'RE ON THE MOVE — BUT NOT JUST YET**

SIFA Fireside is planning to move to a new home which will cement last year's merger by bringing Lower Essex Street and Pershore Street together under one roof.

The proposed move follows the award of a £2 million grant from the Department of Communities and Local Government which will be shared jointly with Crisis, the national homelessness charity.

The new premises will be shared with Crisis, which will run one of its Skylight Centres offering a range of arts, training and skills workshops. It will be based close to the city centre and a search is now underway for a suitable building, possibly in the Digbeth area, which is seen as convenient for service users. But the move is not expected to take place until 2010 at the earliest.

Chief Executive Cath Gilliver says:

"The grant gives us the opportunity to bring all our day services together in premises far better suited to meeting the needs of our service users and which provide better working conditions for staff and volunteers."



**KPMG's Mark Johnston presents Chief Executive Cath Gilliver and Resettlement Team Coordinator Lee Harris with a cheque for £1000 as part of the financial services firm's support for SIFA Fireside.**

# VOLUNTEERS ARE AT THE

SIFA Fireside prides itself on the professionalism of its paid staff but is the first to acknowledge that it could not operate effectively without the help of a team of around 80 volunteers.

They come from a wide variety of backgrounds – many are retired people who want to keep active while making a positive contribution to the community while others are students in health and social care, gaining some practical experience during a placement with SF, a number are training for the priesthood or are members of religious orders while others have previously lived overseas and have come to Britain as asylum seekers. We are particularly grateful to our long term volunteers who include Sister Sabina, from the Selly Park Sisters of St Paul, a tireless PR person and fund raiser, and Kitty Reilly, the Friday 'Team Leader.'

Looking after this band of helpers who play such a key role in the charity is Sacha-Deen Powell, the Volunteer Co-ordinator. She joined in September 2007 after Sister Marie Howley, who had done the job on an unofficial basis since Fireside was founded, decided that it was now – having reached the age of ninety - time to retire. The newly-merged organisation took the decision that it was now time to put this part of its work on a professional basis and created the post which Sacha-Deen now holds.

Sacha-Deen comes from a background of working for the Apex Charitable Trust, where working as an advocacy officer, she helped ex-offenders in their attempt to get back into work. Before moving to the charitable sector she worked in accounts. Her work includes managing the Trainee Volunteer

Joseph came to Britain two years ago as an asylum seeker from Lebanon. Prohibited under immigration regulations from working whilst his application to stay in the country is considered, he decided to help the community by using his professional skills as a chef. Now he spends around four hours every weekday at Pershore Street producing lunch for service users. Joseph is particularly proud that he has incorporated a range of healthy eating options as well as introducing something of the spicy flavour of his home country's cuisine into the daily diet of service users.

# HEART OF OUR WORK



Sacha-Deen Powell

Programme which encourages service users to help at SF as a first step on their road back to independent living. After the successful conclusion of the TVP pilot project, six more service users have signed up for the second programme, which will run for six months. Building on the experience of the pilot programme, three are helping at the drop-in centre, while another three are working at the SF allotment as well as attending a painting and decorating course run by the social enterprise Jericho in Balsall Heath.

Sacha-Deen says:

"We just could not manage to operate on the scale which we do without the help our dedicated band of volunteers gives us."

And there are still opportunities for more volunteers, particularly those willing to help on Mondays and/or Wednesdays, or to help any day with admin tasks. Anyone interested can call Sacha-Deen on 0121 666 7023 or email her at [office@sifafireside.co.uk](mailto:office@sifafireside.co.uk)

When Sue retired three years ago she wanted to continue serving the community as she had done during a career in nursing – although this time as a volunteer. She heard about SIFA Fireside from a friend who attended the same church as her husband and decided to sign up for one morning a week. Now she helps mainly in the kitchen at Pershore Street. Sue says: " I have always been fortunate in life with a good job and a roof over my head. But through my work I'd seen people who were struggling with life in and decided that it was time to repay the good fortune that I'd enjoyed. I have great fun here and have made a lot of new friends over the last couple of years."

## C's story

**For obvious reasons this volunteer prefers to remain anonymous. But the editor salutes her courage in telling her story**

The card displayed in the front window of the Birmingham Voluntary Services Council stated that SIFA was looking for a volunteer researcher. As I'd had previous research experience the opportunity seemed fine and I came in for a discussion with Cath and Sacha. Soon I was coming in every Friday to carry out internet research, finding information staff required, mainly on alcohol and drug abuse. Mind you, on a lighter note I once helped find an auctioneer to sell the gloves used by a famous boxer as a fundraiser.

Until May last year I had been an alcoholic, not chronic, but alcoholism is alcoholism – it was blighting my life. Before I stopped, with the help of AA, I got through two to three bottles of wine per day plus whiskey and vodka. The classic example of a closeted alcoholic, I drank mostly in private. I didn't want company and the bottle became my company.

During my time as a volunteer I also made a massive change to my own life when I changed my name from that of a male to female. With hindsight I should have perhaps said at my interview that I was transgendered. It was not that I sensed either Cath or Sacha would have been particularly fazed by the information. It was just that I did not wish to lose the opportunity of working with SIFA in some way. But I told Cath and Sacha and they, like all the staff, were OK. In a world of much bigotry acceptance is really precious to me.

I was increasingly open in the office, wearing female tops and jewellery, and the response was very positive. To be open about being a trans person does require a certain moral courage. In February, when SIFA and Fireside formally merged, I wore one of my favourite tops and jewellery to the 'bit of a do' held to celebrate the event. Among other people Clare Short MP chatted with me and, as I expected was 'fine' about my appearance. She later visited the SIFA Fireside offices and, once again, I spoke to her, en femme. Well, almost.

I must also add that researching the depressing effects of alcohol abuse has, amongst other factors, helped me to stay dry. Though it is, as AA says, one day at a time and no days off. Also, one drink is too many – a thousand won't be enough. Finally, and very importantly, volunteering, albeit only for a few hours a week, does help alleviate my loneliness, and that means a lot to me. OK, that to date is my very positive experience of volunteering with SIFA Fireside.

# OUR NEW PROJECTS

**bWell**—A two year funding package from bWell — part of Birmingham's Health and Well Being Partnership — will give us the opportunity to run mental health and well being sessions for people in Birmingham's 11 most deprived wards. These include inner-city areas such as Ladywood, Aston and Nechells, as well as areas such as Kingstanding. Activities will include gardening, walking, and cookery, where there will be an emphasis on developing healthy eating habits among people whose diet is often poor. Recently qualified social worker Marie Dennehey (below) has joined the SF team to run the campaign and she will be making contact with other organisations in the city to sign people up for the programme. Participants will be encouraged to take ownership of the programme and help shape it to meet their



Marie Dennehey

**Embrace Project**— SF has been chosen by Alcohol Concern as one of eight national pilot sites for the Embrace Project which focuses on alcohol and domestic violence. It will be working with other organisations involved locally in combating abuse and trying to identify the problem at an early stage. Although the project will concentrate on helping the victims of violence there will also be a serious effort to get the perpetrators to change their behaviour. Research has consistently shown alcohol to be a key factor in cases of assault and abuse in the home.

## Thanks everyone!

A big thank you to everyone who contributed to our Harvest Festival appeal. We had donations from more than 65 schools and churches from across Birmingham as well as beyond the city. All the food donated will be used to provide meals and food parcels over Christmas and into the New Year.

## Islamic community's kindly Ramadan gesture



Volunteers from Islamic Relief served a delicious curry lunch to service users in September during Ramadan. It was a particularly kind gesture as adherence to Islamic principles prohibits followers of the faith from eating and drinking between sunrise and sunset during Ramadan.

## Chief Exec steps up the pace

Chief Executive Cath Gilliver takes a well earned rest after completing a six kilometre sponsored run in Senneleys Park which raised £300.



## All smiles in the kitchen



Staff and residents settle into their new premises at Bordeshale House.

## Drop-in Opening Times

### LES, 18–28 Lower Essex St

Monday to Friday,  
9.00– 10.45 am

Breakfast

Showers

Laundry (rough sleepers only)

Accommodation advice surgery  
(9.30 – 10.30)

Phone calls

Afternoon activities:

2.00 – 3.00 pm

Saturday & Sunday: 10.30 –  
11.30 am

Tea, coffee, advice, dealing with  
emergencies

### Fireside, 122 Pershore St

Monday to Friday

11.15 – 12 noon: Morning  
activities

Clothing (Tuesdays & Fridays),  
showers (rough sleepers only),  
food parcels and advice also  
available during this session

12 noon – 1.00 pm: Lunch

Monday to Thursday, 2.00 –  
3.00 pm

Accommodation advice surgery

*We will be closed on Thursday  
29<sup>th</sup> January and Thursday 26<sup>th</sup>  
February for staff training*

## Services and Activities

### Monday

9.30 – 12.30 at Fireside  
(fortnightly)

Debt Advice & Welfare, by appoint-  
ment

During LES drop-in

Homeless Services — help for rough  
sleepers

11.15 – 12.00 at Fireside

Quiz with Charles & Winston

2.00 – 3.00 at LES

Pictorial & Games

### Tuesday

During LES drop-in

Nurse

11.15 – 12.00 at Fireside

Clothes

2.00 – 3.00 at LES

Women's Group

### Wednesday

11.00 – 12.30 & 1.00 – 2.30

IT Training at LES

11.15 – 12.00 at Fireside

Quiz

2.00 – 3.00 at LES

Arts & Crafts

### Thursday

During LES drop-in

Chiropodist

11.15 – 12.00 at Fireside

Discussion Group

2.00 – 3.00 at Fireside

bWell Cookery Class

### Friday

During LES drop-in

Nurse & Skills for Life

11.15 – 12.00 at Fireside

Clothes

2.00 – 3.00 at LES

Bingo with Charles

A FREE Conference from



Funded by



# Chance 4 Change

building bridges to work through volunteering

**On: Tuesday 3rd February**

**At: Carrs Lane Conference Centre**

**Times: 9.30 for 10am start - 4pm**

**Light refreshments and lunch provided**

## **Speakers:**

- Kath Dane from GROW (Thames Reach)
- Charlotte Potter-Powell from Homeless Link
- Cath Gilliver from SIFA Fireside

*There will also be a choice of afternoon seminars (details to be confirmed)*

**For more information, or to book your place, please contact Ellie Clifton on 0121 666 7023, or email [office@sifafireside.co.uk](mailto:office@sifafireside.co.uk)**