



LATH ANNUAL CHAIRMAN'S NEWSLETTER 2024

Introduction

First of all, I would like to introduce myself as the new Chairman of LATH, taking on the mantle previously held by the legends that are Bernard Potter and John McManus. I started volunteering with LATH in April 2023, and have over 40 years' experience working in corporate environments, meaning I understand that having a clear vision, achievable objectives and a strong structure are the fundamentals of a good organisation. I do hope I can mirror the commitment and service to the community the previous Chairmen have shown.

Retirement

On another note, Pat Gardener has recently retired from LATH as both a Trustee and as the Treasurer. Pat has been a volunteer with LATH for many years, maintaining the integrity of the accounts and also the updates required legally for the Charity Commission. Her contribution will be sorely missed.

Success of the Charity

Over the last 12 months we have seen a significant increase in the number of clients using the drop-in and we now regularly have more than 40 clients in a session. The number of visits made by the clients in 2024 was 3,127; this compares with 2,285 visits in 2023 - an increase of nearly 40%. It looks like we are doing a good job and we are being recognised by the homeless and vulnerable for the services provided.

There is no doubt that the new Caritas centre has played a vital part in the success of LATH as the building has an excellent location and great facilities, including a shower and laundry. It also enables LATH to run many of its fundraising events at the centre, almost a purpose-built facility. I hope our relationship with Caritas grows stronger and remains beneficial to both parties.

The success of the charity can also be seen by the regular attendance at the centre of various groups to help the clients. In particular, Change Grow Live, who are an addiction charity, have monthly sessions booked into the diary at the centre. Liver health, sexually transmitted diseases, and eye testing groups also visit the centre periodically.

Improving Relationships

Our relationship with the other Crewe charities in the same field has improved. There have been two meetings held, organised by a Crewe Town Councillor, which all the charities



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attended. I also visited Chance Changing Lives and the Salvation Army facilities to see if we could learn from them and to explore if there was anything we could do as joint charities. This latter point needs further exploration as both Chance and the Salvation Army have much larger budgets than LATH.

We have a great relationship with both Cheshire East and Crewe Councils, with the Crewe Mayors visiting 3 times during the year. In addition, one of the councillors for Crewe attends the drop-in regularly to share updates on the homeless and vulnerable in Crewe. The outreach workers for Cheshire East are weekly visitors to the Centre, to check on the homeless situation and for updates on any of the clients. Finally, the local MP for Crewe and Nantwich, Connor Naismith, attended the Centre and was introduced to all the clients and volunteers to help understand the issues both groups face. I think overall, these visits are a measure of the success LATH has had building relationships with the various bodies also involved in helping the homeless and vulnerable in the Crewe area.

Food donations

Greggs continue to support the charity with twice weekly donations from one store and a weekly donation from the Crewe town centre store. The Greggs pastries and cakes are always eagerly anticipated by the clients.

New this year, we collect twice weekly from Aldi, who provide a mixed bag of food donations, which are either used for meals or distributed to the clients.

In addition, in 2024 we received a grant from the National Lottery to provide a hot meal at each session of the drop-in. This has enabled LATH to provide nourishing, healthy food for the clients, which has proved to be very popular. The clients have benefited significantly from the donations and grants and we try to ensure no one leaves the centre hungry.

Grants

We cannot talk about 2024 without acknowledging the various grants that we had during the year. LATH entered the year with the grant from Bentley still in place; this was primarily to fund Pathways (social prescribing) and to pay the rent on the Caritas Centre. However, the relationship with Bentley requires attention and rebuilding before we can re-apply for a follow up grant.

On a positive note, as mentioned above, we received a grant from the National Lottery to fund food, clothes, sleeping bags and tents. This grant has been very beneficial to the clients and they have been appreciative, in particular, of the clean underwear we have been able to provide, especially after using the shower.



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There were also two grants from Crewe Town Council, partly to fund training for the volunteers and partly to provide sturdy winter shoes for the clients.

Finally, we received the first year's payment of a 3 year grant from Nantwich Church Wardens as a contribution to the costs of supporting clients specifically from Nantwich.

Donations and Fund-Raising

Can I say a big thank you to the sponsors and Friends of LATH who provide donations to the charity and basically keep LATH afloat. Simply, without you we would not exist. In particular, I have to mention one specific sponsor, Beautonic Beauty, who has made significant donations throughout the year. In addition, a local church is regularly donating to LATH, and we are very grateful for this support.

In addition to the Friends of LATH, three companies, Navio Lounge, Equans and Goddard Dunbar, organised warm clothing appeals on behalf of LATH. We had more than 20 bags of clothes from these companies, received just as we were going into the cold weather. Navio Lounge also provided and cooked a meal for LATH clients at the end of November, which was enjoyed by all.

There were five LATH fund-raising events in the year, all raising significant funds towards the running of the drop-in. The autumn concert was the most successful financially, but we also had a bingo night, a quiz night, and had tombola stand at the Summer and Christmas Fairs run by Caritas. Each event required significant input from the volunteers and thank you to those who made them a great success. The plan is to have a similar cycle of fund-raising events in 2025 and hopefully these will be as successful.

Volunteers

The first point to make on the volunteers is how great they are. Remembering that no-one receives a penny for their work for the charity, unlike the other large charities based in Crewe in the same field who have some paid staff, and they do a great job. This year we have been joined by Ali Colclough, Liz Morgan, Janet Bannister, Graham Naylor, Josta Hopps, and Francis Dick, all great additions to our volunteer team. We are always looking for new volunteers to be trained to work in either the kitchen or in front of house.

In recognition of the increased level of professionalism of our volunteers, during the year we started ensuring our volunteers were properly trained for the roles they are doing. All the kitchen staff have been trained in Food Hygiene to at least grade 1, and the Front of House staff are required to complete the basics of safeguarding in order to work with the clients. Additionally, all volunteers received basic First Aid training. The training has been funded by



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a grant provided by Crewe Town Council, and has not come out of the Friends of LATH donations, which all go to help the clients.

Some of our volunteers kindly gave up time on Christmas Day and Boxing Day to ensure the clients had somewhere to go over Christmas. There were two new homeless men that attended on Christmas Day. In addition, a further 25 clients came for the Christmas curry provided by Muktadir Khan, an NHS staff member. Boxing Day saw a further 20 clients attending for warming soup and hot drinks. Without LATH it is not clear where the clients would have received food and drink over that period.

Summary

From my point of view, what an exciting last 12 months it has been for LATH, and I hope you all feel the same. LATH is definitely a positive influence in Crewe, and we feel we have a beneficial impact on our clients. To keep you updated we are working to improve the website (<https://www.lathgroup.org>) by making it more current and proactive. In the meantime, you can follow our weekly updates on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/LATHcrewe>) to keep up to date on our activities.

Mick Tobin, Chairman



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