

DIFFERENT VIEWS UNDER ONE ROOF

Marion's tale

Marion Jarman was reviewing the agenda for tomorrow's quarterly executive committee meeting of the local branch of 'One Roof.' In her own Chair's report she had one or two developments to talk about. The shop was doing better after Brian Hillyer's re-organisation. Even so, Marion mused, it required a lot of effort compared with the return. Still, it did 'put the charity on the High Street'. That said, it was just as well that Brian was able to give so much time to managing it since his retirement.

The shop was just one way in which income was growing, Marion reflected. Winston Kingsley was another. A full-time, salaried fund-raiser. How things had changed. It was five years since she and three friends had been gripped by the compulsion 'to do something' about the people who had been sleeping rough in the shelters along the promenade, and elsewhere in the town. It had begun with a twice-weekly round of soup and sandwiches. The local newspaper had got hold of their story. The night-round had been photographed and featured, and the result had been further offers of help, including donations of food from local stores – and within a few months to the establishment of a local branch of One Roof.

Since then, Marion reflected, the work had taken over more and more of her life and the lives of the others. At first, she had the sense that there was an emergency; yet, here they were, four years on, still in business, as it were. The number of rough sleepers had risen in what people thought was a prosperous seaside town. Two years ago, they had opened what, even then, they thought would be a temporary shelter. It was still there. Of course, there was the constant concern for the flow of funds into the branch; in fact, Marion was only too conscious that over the last six months she'd spent more time thinking about fund-raising than she had about homeless people. No doubt, she could pass all those worries to Winston. If he got on with the fund-raising, then she could give more time to the shelter and to the shop. The real work, Marion couldn't help thinking.

Winston's tale

For Winston Kingsley the past three months hadn't been easy. He'd sensed at the interview that not everyone wanted a paid fund-raiser on the books. One or two members of the committee had even wondered 'when he was going to earn his salary'. Well, they had agreed his proposals at the interview, and he'd kept to them. Marion Jarman and her team's commitment and hard work had to be matched now by a reliable flow of funds into the organisation. The problem wasn't going to go away. It was time to plan on the assumption that they or someone like them would still be helping local homeless people in five or ten years' time. In London, where Winston had worked full-time in the marketing department of a City firm and part-time as a volunteer for a branch of One Roof, he had learned that market economies were chilling places for the weak and the unlucky. Such was the impact of the voluntary work on him that he had applied for the full time fund-raising job with this branch. And things had worked out quite well.

In line with the plan he had set out at his interview, he had targeted the corporate sector. He had spoken at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce and at the two Rotary Clubs. He had visited 21 local businesses. Staff in those businesses had agreed to contribute to the branch by through payroll giving from their salaries. In addition, he'd received some immediate contributions from businesses themselves. He'd done enough already, he reckoned, to counter the 'Are you earning your salary?' jibes.

More importantly, Sam Harrington, the chairman of Harrington's, had been immediately interested in Winston's idea of corporate 'Friends of One Roof', employers who committed to providing regular support. Where the chairman of the town's largest department store led, Winston had no doubt others would follow. In Winston's mind there would be opportunities

during the year to recognise the patronage of the Friends. The newsletter would provide one way of marking their generosity. He was looking forward to making his report. He had taken the first steps towards establishing a reliable funding base. The work depended on the funds; the funds depended on his marketing. Marion, at least, would understand. So too would Brian Hillyer. Meanwhile, there were one or two other things to deal with. The National Director, having provided a new IT system, was pressing for regular financial reports. Meanwhile, he'd received the papers for the next national staff meeting. He was also due to present a report – about his corporate Friends scheme – to that meeting. Commendable, of course, Winston told himself, but he couldn't help thinking it was yet another distraction from the real work of generating those funds.

Mary's tale

Mary Clifford, for her part, was thinking more about slippery slopes. She had been one of 'the originals' along with Marion. In her own words, she had been campaigning for social justice all her life – 'left-handed, left-wing, and', she was likely to add with a rueful grin, 'left-out these days'. She had opposed the appointment of the salaried fund-raiser, and she had strong reservations about Winston's activities. It was always the same. First, the passion, then, bit by bit, along come the organisation people. What really mattered was the commitment of individual volunteers to the improvement of their fellows, in this instance, the homeless here in this sea-side town. The town had an obligation to those homeless people, and it was her business, and the business of them all, to make sure that the town know about its dispossessed citizens and met its obligation to them. The shop, the collecting tins on Saturday mornings – they were a source of funds, but they were also a way of keeping the issue before the local public. Perhaps her letter to the local newspaper would do something to jolt local consciences. The May Bank Holiday, the start of the summer season, was a good time to hold the first of a series of Homeless Marches through the town. Banners, speeches, a band or two, collecting tins, a culminating mass Sleep-in in the Shopping Arcade outside Harringtons – in this way, as she explained in the letter, public concern at homelessness in the town could be harnessed, and Summer visitors could see what was going on.

Of course, the new fund-raiser had different views. He had ideas of corporate fund-raising, as he put it 'working with the local business community'. Well, Mary thought, if you want to sup with the likes of Harrington then you'd better use the longest spoon you have. Trade unions were still not recognised in the store, and a number of people (Mary included) continued to boycott it after it had featured a display of real fur coats in its windows three Christmases ago. The best thing that any one of those corporate fat cats could do was to offer a job to some of those homeless people. But she didn't think that there was much hope of that. What had to be done was to keep the light of the homeless before the public. Enthuse the volunteers. Rattle the tins. Organise the marches. Stick to your principles. Stick to the real work. And if that meant making a fuss at the quarterly meeting, so be it.