

## HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS NEWS

# Family matters

**Kelly Mattison** reports on the closure of an accommodation centre that has been helping homeless mothers and their young children for 30 years

**A supported accommodation unit in Manchester for young homeless mothers and their children is set to close at the end of the month due to funding cuts.**

Manchester City Council has withdrawn a £165,000 a year grant to Caritas, the Catholic charity that runs Marillac House.

The unit, based in Victoria Park, has been providing help and support to women aged 16-25 for 30 years and bosses say they are "devastated" by the news. Catherine Kennedy, manager at Marillac, said: "We all hoped that maybe a benefactor would come forward but that's not happened so it's starting to feel very real now."

Marillac House has helped at least 300 women who were either

**Many were fleeing abusive relationships and became homeless**

and independence. Many had been forced to leave home after getting pregnant or were fleeing abusive relationships and became homeless.

A former resident of Marillac, 20, who asked not to be named, said her eight-month stay with her young baby at the unit helped her to regain her confidence after suffering severe domestic violence.

"I was referred to Marillac through social services," she said. "At first I hated it and just thought they wanted to take my kids off me but then I was given a key worker and realised the staff genuinely wanted to help me."

She was taught independent living skills so that she could cope on her own, including how to cook for herself.

"They also showed me how to look after my child on my own, but it felt

good to know that staff were there 24/7 if I did need help and advice," she added.

Through Marillac she also accessed support from Women's Aid and attended a Surestart centre in Longsight. She now lives in rented accommodation with her two children.

There are just two women left in the unit's 11 bed-sits now and they will be moving out by the end of the month. Kennedy said it has been very challenging to find all the residents suitable housing. Some have moved on to other mother and baby units if they have needed long-term support and others have gone into private renting. "It's only this week we've come to know everybody is fixed up," said Kennedy.

A similar unit founded by Caritas in Bolton has also lost its funding and will change the type of services delivered, sizing down its

accommodation provision.

Rosaleen Griffin, head of the children and families service at Caritas, said: "We are extremely sorry that the contracts with Manchester and Bolton have not been continued for services which have supported mothers and their babies for over 20 years."

She believes there is still a need for these services and that Caritas will continue to support families that need it most.

Darian, a resident at Bolton, said: "We have a great relationship here and are like one big family, including the staff. It is really sad that there is going to be a closure here but I appreciate everything done for me. I wouldn't be the person I am today if I weren't here."

Glynn Evans, executive member for adults at Manchester City Council, said it had to make some very difficult decisions following the severity of central government's financial settlement.

"Our Supporting People fund, which helps the most vulnerable in the city, has lost a third of its budget following a change in the way the grant was allocated and we tried to mitigate that by putting an extra £4 million in the budget," said Evans. But he added that it was "inevitable" that the effects of the cuts on some of Manchester's most vulnerable and marginalised people will be "devastating".



A young mum bonding with her daughter at a Caritas centre

## VENDOR CODE OF CONDUCT

All vendors selling **The Big Issue in the North** must abide by the Code of Conduct, the set of rules governing how they work. Outreach teams from **The Big Issue in the North** patrol the streets daily to check vendors' behaviour and to encourage and support them while working. Here are some of the key rules:

- Vendors can only sell on designated pitches organised by **The Big Issue in the North**.
- Vendors cannot sell between 8.00pm and 7.00am (6.00pm in Liverpool city centre). Police officers have the authority to confiscate magazines and badges if they witness vendors selling during these hours.
- Vendors must always wear their own badge when buying or selling the magazine and only sell magazines with their number on.
- Vendors can only buy magazines for themselves.
- Vendors must not use physical or verbal aggression towards the public or other vendors.
- Vendors are not allowed to sell if staff feel they are unfit to do so.
- Vendors must stand when selling; sitting down is an obstruction to the public highway and is illegal.
- Vendors must not beg for money using the magazine. Asking for spare change or other items is considered to be begging.
- Vendors can only charge £2.00 for each magazine and must always give the customer the magazine once paid for. Failing to do so is fraudulent and may result in police involvement.

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**The Big Issue in the North** Trust raises funds to provide services for homeless vendors of this magazine.