



# TheBigLife**group** Changing Lives 2007 - 2008



# What does The Big Life group offer?

The Big Life group creates opportunities for people to change their lives for the better. The group was formed in 2002 and now includes five businesses and three charities: The Big Life Company, The Big Issue in the North, Aisha Childcare, Big Life Employment, Open Door, The Big Issue in the North Trust, Big Life Centres and Self Help Services.

**These businesses and charities offer a range of services in areas across the North of England including:**

Production and distribution of The Big Issue in the North magazine which provides socially excluded people with the chance to earn a **legitimate income** and signposting to services to help them move on in life

Providing training and **employment opportunities** to people who face additional barriers to employment

A **mentoring project** for young people involved in crime or gangs

Delivery of six health and **community resource centres** in Greater Manchester offering a range of health and well being services

Delivery of **self-help** groups, structured self-help programmes and computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy packages

Management of the **Summergrove** project in Liverpool for parents who have had a drug or alcohol dependency in the past to be re-united with their children and supported to stay together

Delivery of a Sure Start **children's centre** in Longsight and a range of family support services in central Manchester

High quality **childcare** delivered from a day nursery and a mobile crèche service

Delivery of a range of **complementary therapies** including massage and homeopathy alongside counselling services

Photo: Face painting at a family event held at the Willow Tree Centre in Salford






# Our Centres

The Big Life group manages **6** health and community resource centres across Greater Manchester

Between April 2007 and March 2008 our centres received over **97,000** visits and over **55,900** telephone calls

The centres ran **20** events this year including health and well being days, open days and summer events which were attended by over **750** people from the local community

Surveys were conducted in three of the six centres during this year (Kath Locke, Zion and Stockport's Well Being Centre). Of those people surveyed **78%** rated their centre as being "very good" and **87%** said that the centres make a difference to people's lives



## Peter: Zion Parenting Group

"I had a loving, stable relationship with the mother of my three children until a tragic incident tore my family's world apart. My partner died unexpectedly two weeks after a violent street attack and I was left devastated and unable to cope with my three children. It particularly affected my eldest son - he has had a lot of problems since and has struggled to cope.

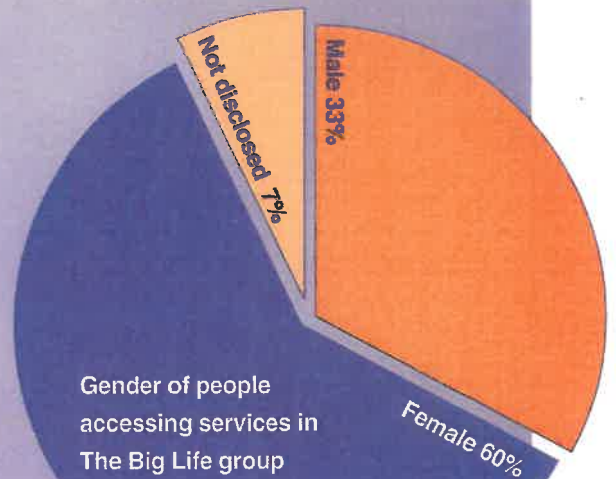
After I was assessed by social workers at home, it was decided that I couldn't manage to look after my children and it was recommended that they went to live with my mother-in-law. The children were witnessing a lot of arguments and fighting between me and my mother in law and as a result I was not allowed to see my children at all. My social workers told me about the Zion Community Resource and recommended that I try and take some courses.

I came to the Zion to access the anger management course and a parenting course. It's been vital in showing me how to deal with the children, how to step back when they are behaving in a certain way, when to use discipline and how to reward them for good behaviour.

I was determined to prove to social workers that I could develop the skills needed to look after my own children and I've recently had my children returned to me. I'll carry on coming to the Zion to get help when it's needed, I'm interested in having bereavement counselling in the future. I want to keep on moving forward and want to be able to continue to keep looking after my three children."

Photo: Drumming workshop at the Energise Centre, Salford

# Who We Work With



Between April 2007 and March 2008 over **8,200** people used services provided by The Big Life group and over **5,450** assessments were carried out

Where ethnic origin was monitored, **75%** of people accessing our services came from Black or Ethnic Minority communities

## Case Study: Jane

"I spent the past 7 years using heroin and crack cocaine, whilst my three children were raised by my father for the majority of their lives. I'd suffered domestic violence and abuse from former partners, so I decided to go with my children to my father's and enter drug treatment. Following this, I was referred to Summergrove.

When I came to Summergrove, I had no parenting skills and had trouble reading, writing and with numbers because I left school when I was 12. I also had some mental health and physical health problems which I'd previously ignored.

My key-worker at Summergrove, with the support of the rest of the staff team, got me the necessary funding for childcare, which meant I could attend various appointments connected to my physical and mental health needs and to enter counselling. The staff really supported me to get some health treatment, attending appointments with me and helping me construct question lists that I could use when attending appointments. The project also managed my medication to make sure it was effective.

As well as all this, the staff at Summergrove helped me develop my parenting skills. They devised visual aids which helped me develop a routine around cleaning, washing, ironing, shopping and maintaining my tenancy. I'm hoping to apply for a part-time course at college soon and I'm making steps towards being the main carer for my children."

Photo: A member of the 2007 England Homeless World Cup team, organised by The Big Issue in the North

Photo: Jason Lock



# Volunteers & Placements

Between April 2007 and March 2008 The Big Life group had **266** volunteers who worked in a variety of roles such as running self help groups, facilitating the Zion Women's group, working at the Stockport Well Being Centre and delivering complementary therapies

**22** volunteers moved into work during this year and **12** went on to do further training courses

**43** people were on work placements within the group during this year

Photo: Lynda from the Stockport Well Being Centre

## Case Study: Lynda

Lynda has been volunteering with the Well Being Centre since its opening in autumn 2006.

"I'm a carer for two people with mental health problems, and when I first came to the Well Being Centre I felt that caring was taking over my life. I was also recovering from an operation and couldn't go back to paid work at the time, so volunteering at the centre was nice, as it was doing something for myself.

As a result of volunteering at the centre, I've developed skills and gained experience in dealing with people from all walks of life. My social life has also improved through making friends with other volunteers and taking responsibility for the "social committee", organising events and outings for the volunteers. I've also joined the Well Being Centre's fundraising group to help raise money for the centre.

Working at the centre inspired me to embark on a Health & Social Care Diploma at Stockport College, which I completed with distinction and I'm now planning to follow up with a part-time

degree. I also took a temporary paid position at the Well Being Centre as a Volunteer Support Worker, where I was able to further develop my skills and knowledge. I'm now looking for a permanent job in the field of health and social care.

Volunteering is good because it feels as though you are putting something back. My husband's health has also improved since I've been volunteering here. When I was at home I think I was smothering him a bit, and being together day in and day out wasn't healthy. Now he drives me to work and picks me up, which gets him out of the house, and he does more at home, doing the housework and looking after our two children.

The Well Being Centre is a fantastic place. Everyone who comes in here gets something out of it – even if they only come in once. It's nice to see people leave happy. They come thinking that it's the end of the world, that they'll never find the services they need to help them, and then we have a chat to them and signpost them to the right service, giving them phone numbers and details... This is also a great place to volunteer. This place empowers people."





# Outcomes

Between April 2007 and March 2008:

**121** people moved into temporary or permanent accommodation

**126** people found employment

**57** people became volunteers

**1,526** people took up training

**213** people were referred to drug treatment or therapies

Photo: Parents get their Parenting Skills certificates from the Zion Parenting Class

## Case Study: David

"I suffered years of abuse and threats of violence from my brothers. They introduced me to alcohol and drugs and by the time I left home, when I was in my early 20's, I was using heroin and crack. When I registered with The Big Issue in the North I was rough sleeping and in poor health with a spiralling drug habit.

The staff at The Big Issue in the North tried to help me, booking appointments for hostels and for the doctors, but I often didn't attend because my life was quite chaotic. Because my health was deteriorating even more, the staff made the decision to take me to the hospital themselves, where I was urgently admitted. My health had reached a point where the doctors were unsure at first if I would survive and were very clear that if I didn't address my lifestyle, I would die within the coming weeks or months.

This hit home and I decided I would fight for my health. My support workers remained in regular contact with me through hospital visits and phone calls and they arranged for two local church groups to provide support as well.

My health improved steadily and within six weeks, staff were working with the ward on my discharge. I

was interviewed in hospital by a hostel worker and when I left went straight into a hostel. But I found it difficult to adapt to the hostel environment and its rules and regulations and I also struggled to remain drug free, because there were other drug users around me and I relapsed more than once.

The Big Issue in the North staff worked with the hostel to address these issues and prepare me for a detox and rehab placement. I also began to use a drug support agency and attended basic skills classes.

Once in detox, I felt ready to try to rebuild a relationship with my children. Staff tracked down a contact address for my sons and wrote to them explaining the progress I had made since they had last seen me. They contacted me immediately by telephone. I know they were apprehensive that they might be let down again, but once I moved to a rehab placement they made their first visit.

I'm now in level two of my rehabilitation and preparing to take maths, English and IT qualifications and I'm carrying out voluntary work with the council. I'm rebuilding a strong relationship with my children who visit me regularly. In a couple of weeks, I'm moving into my own place, with support. This is the new start I've always wanted."

# Quality of Life

Photo: Relaxation at the Kath Locke Centre

Between April 2007 and March 2008, **604** Quality of Life assessments were carried out. **81%** of people said their Quality of Life had improved!

## Case Study: Chris

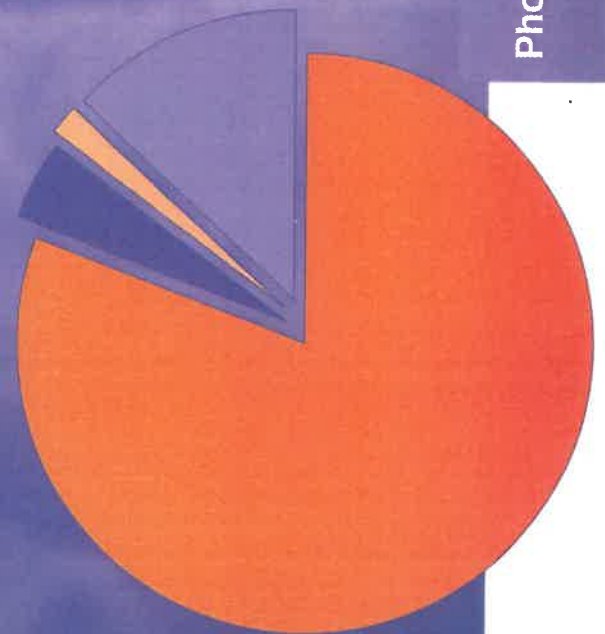
"In October 2007 I was diagnosed with clinical depression following a sudden and traumatic split from my partner. I suffered with five different anxiety disorders and was unable to leave the house, let alone work. Being self employed, it was a very distressing time.

I decided to try anything possible to get better. After a long chat with my GP, I did some research and learnt about the Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (cCBT) course facilitated by Self Help Services. It was completely free of charge and was also quick and easy to access rather than having to wait on a lengthy NHS waiting list for counselling.

The cCBT course was very enlightening. Whilst taking the course I was also able to gain support from Self Help Services, such as Indian Head Massage and Acupuncture. I found both treatments very therapeutic and they significantly helped me relax, always giving me my best night's sleep of the week!

Now, nearly eight months later and having finished the cCBT course, I feel a lot better than I did when it all began. I'm still on antidepressants and still have Indian Head Massages and Acupuncture when I can, but most importantly I also refer back to my coursework from the cCBT whenever I hit a stumbling block.

If I'd had to wait for my first treatment I would certainly not be where I am emotionally, physically and financially today. The whole experience with Self Help Services has been fantastic. I can't heap praise on them enough, both in terms of what they offer and the people that they are. I am truly indebted."



Results of Quality of Life (QOL) assessments

- QOL Improved 81%
- QOL stayed the same 4.5%
- QOL deteriorated 1.5%
- 2nd assessment not completed 13%\*

*\*Quality of Life assessments are taken at the start of someone entering a service and then again after a period of time spent using that service*



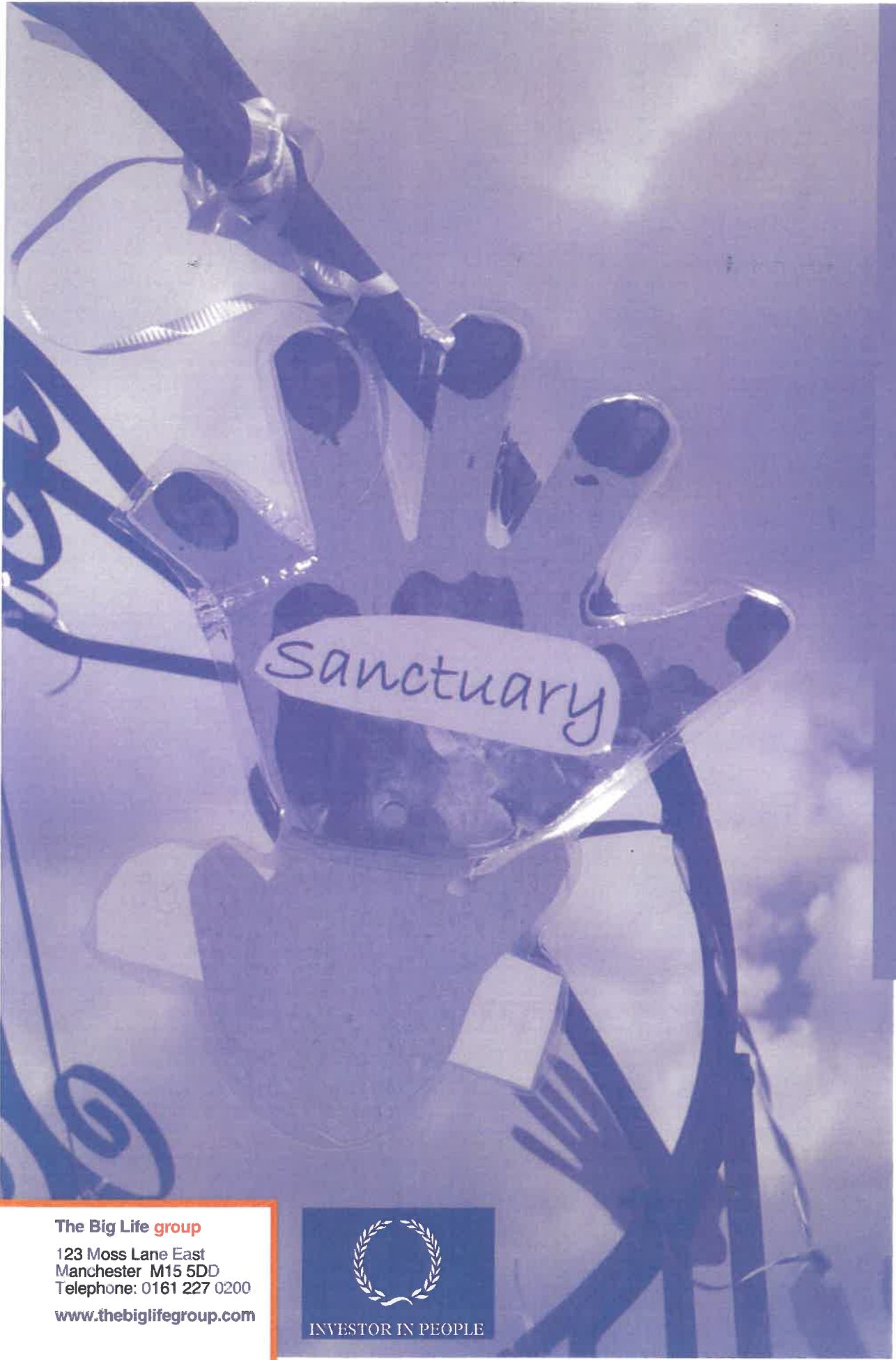


Photo: A new seating area in the Summergrove garden, decorated by residents

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