



Homes, not houses

Opportunities to learn a living

Pride and a sense of purpose

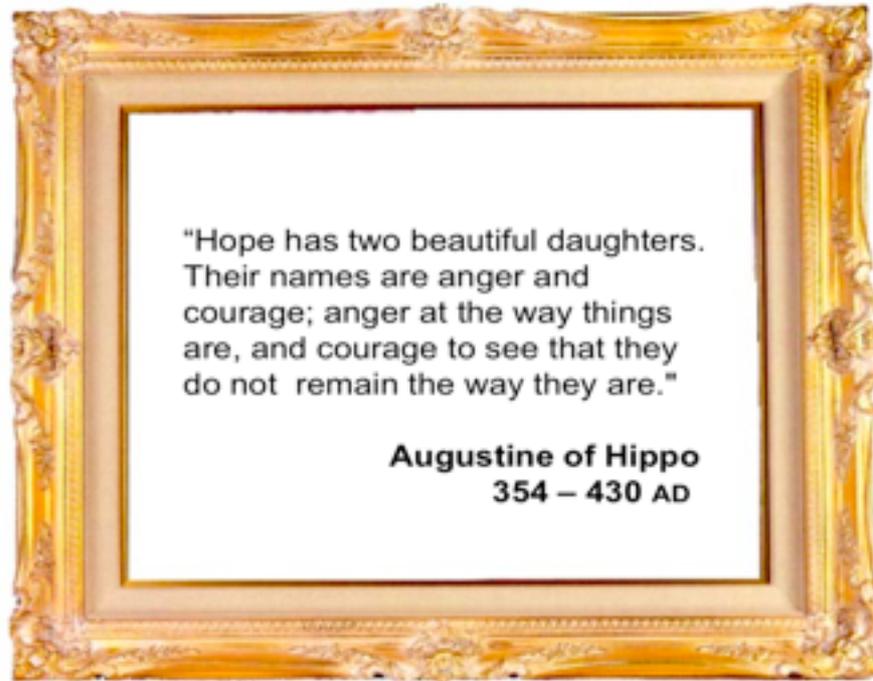
Employability and earned income

THE ABSTRACT :

being an overview of the problem and the proposed solution.

Dr Mandy Walker
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The **HOPE**TM Strategy



Abstract

being an overview of the problem
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In December 2011 the United Kingdom is gripped in economic crisis. There is a marked rise in the number of young people who are workless and homeless. Unemployment across the nation is the highest for thirty years. The need for social housing is pressing. There is no longer Treasury money available to build new houses. Independent property developers who may want to build affordable houses are restrained by cash flow as potential buyers for their completed and ready for sale houses are locked in a depressed property market.

At the same time, there are an estimated one million empty homes in the country. Empty Council houses cleared for renovation remain unoccupied because there are no funds to pay for refurbishment. Privately owned empty houses remain unoccupied for various reasons all linked to the economic down turn. Local councils have seriously reduced budget and must find ways to deliver cost effective essential public services. No matter how great the value, non-essential public services are unaffordable in the current climate. The Coalition Government worry about the state of an impoverished nation asked to assimilate serious Austerity Measures.

Times are hard for most people. Those who can, will tighten their belts. Those who are already carrying no fat, will starve. Those who are homeless and feel hopeless remain in need, and their ranks are swelling. At the frontline relief of homelessness and associated need are third sector agencies; charities that run not-for-profit operations. They provide the critical support services for vulnerable people that, in late 2011, are both priceless to society and unaffordable to the State. The majority of their funding comes from the Treasury purse; passed to local authorities, whose Supporting People departments compete voluntary sector agencies and award contracts for support services according to irregular criterion across the country. However, a common differentiator is price. Thus, charities are currently competing to deliver their specialist support to vulnerable people on a shoestring, and the contract is typically awarded to those who can persuade hard pressed commissioners that their charitable service can most reliably deliver the impossible.

This situation is not driven by lack of intellect, concern, or integrity. The situation is the consequence of lack of funds and a coherent strategy that goes beyond quick fixes and provides sustainable solutions. This necessary challenge is laid upon the third sector as much as the rest of the country. As Plato teaches; the true creator is necessity, who is the mother of invention. Charities that want to survive must now generate growth and create wealth for themselves, in a way that sustains their critical services. The alternative is that they will fold.

The HOPE™ Strategy is an integrated approach to addressing the multiple challenges of homelessness, worklessness, and hopelessness at one and the same time. It is designed to bring measureable benefit to homeless and vulnerable people, third sector agencies, public sector authorities, private sector entities, and by extension, both local communities and society at large, by delivering a sustainable solution through wealth creation and a break in the cycle of benefits dependency. Whilst there are those who might describe it as The Big Society, HOPE™ is best described as a philosophy, a policy, a strategy, a brave ambition and perhaps even, a moral imperative.

The solution is to integrate the problems faced by vulnerable people and those who have a vested interest in meeting their needs, and realise the opportunities to create both social and economic wealth in the process. The construct is to work together across voluntary, public, and private sectors to take properties that are dilapidated or decaying, and spaces that are disused or derelict, and develop programmes of integrated activity that engage and educate vulnerable and homeless people in the therapeutic creation of their own homes and jobs. Properties that are renovated can become assets of the charities who manage the programmes of support that make it real, and the same charities can become partners in businesses and services that emerge. A strategy that supports even the most vulnerable to take responsibility for their own lives and livelihoods will impact the well being of those individuals and in doing so, the communities in which they seek to make their contribution.

Homes not houses.

If we establish homes, not simply renovated houses, we can challenge the unsettling practice and pattern of moving on for the sake of it. People need a sense of belonging to a community, and a supported opportunity to establish roots. We must also challenge the established practice of short-hold tenancies and make it a priority to find ways that enable settlement in homes, not houses, and build stability and engagement in community living.

Opportunities to learn a living.

If we can create opportunities for vulnerable people to learn how to make a living and create value for themselves, then we can also generate the conditions for social enterprises and social entrepreneurs to emerge. If charities can be partners in such endeavour, then income stream for both the workers and the sponsors is possible. We should aspire to build an access route for vulnerable people to engage in the National Apprenticeship programmes and other education programmes. An organised social apprenticeship programme can serve as an alternative route to professional training for vulnerable men and women whose chaotic lives have required them to solve practical problems on a daily basis and who typically recoil from classroom based education.

Pride and a sense of purpose.

The Big Issue model has amply demonstrated the value, both actual and implied, which comes from being able to trade *something* in exchange for cash earnings. Nothing should be free, save the immediate intervention required to enable a life to survive. It is not affordable any longer, nor was it ever morally sound, to simply address the fact that those in our society whose broken lives present a problem should be helped to cease being a problem. Our ambition should be to construct a paradigm where the expectation swings hard over, and those who were once broken and needy first take responsibility for themselves, and then are enabled and supported to make a *contribution to* society. Mental wellbeing is encouraged when people are able to feel pride and a sense of purpose, which cannot be achieved unless we change the presentation of what we currently call 'charity'.

Employability and earned income.

The benefits culture should be challenged, and charities could lead by example. The mood in our country is that it is unacceptable for people to simply survive on state handouts. Society in 2011 requires that individuals earn their income. At the same time, it is demeaning to human dignity to have no choice and to be required to be grateful for the benevolence that others graciously bestow. I believe that charities should stop taking handouts too and move away from dependency on gifted and awarded funds, and move towards generating a proportion of earned income. There are services provided by the third sector that are sellable commodities. When one can understand what it takes to create wealth, then there is less inclination to squander it. At the same time, we should engage vulnerable people in delivery of their own support programmes through better practical engagement, by enabling a currency of sweat equity, and by redefining what charity means in a recession. Charity stems from the Latin root 'caritas', meaning 'care', not 'pity'.

The HOPE™ Strategy interlocks these interdependent themes. There is no money left to provide government funded charity in the way we have been doing; vulnerable people must be enabled to help themselves. I imagine a squad of vulnerable young men and women, part of a common band of social apprentices, endorsed by the local college, properly trained and professionally turned out in branded overalls, proud to be making a contribution. They spend their time learning a living and making a practical difference; clearing rubbish, renovating houses, repairing damage, painting and decorating, growing plants, creating gardens, and building homes and lives for themselves. In exchange for their hours of labour they achieve HOPE™ and the creation of wealth in a way that makes order out of chaos and delivers a believable route to a better future.

A practical testing of this theoretical premise is underway in South Yorkshire. The charity, Action Housing and Support, working in collaboration with Rotherham College, supported by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and steered by private sector partnership expertise and experience, are building a pilot project where HOPE™ is being made real. The action research is teaching us that better is achievable, and the endeavour is releasing energy that suggests sustainability is also possible.

That this makes good sense is not news. We have known for decades the proverbial wisdom that the ability to achieve through ones own endeavour is of greater benefit than a free handout. Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; show him how to fish and you (potentially) feed him for a lifetime. Give a man a roof and you shelter him for a day, show him how to build a home and make a life and you (potentially) shelter him for a lifetime.

The HOPE™ Strategy is an integrated approach to addressing the multiple challenges of homelessness, worklessness, and hopelessness at one and the same time. It is designed to deliver homes and jobs to homeless and vulnerable people, economic independence to the third sector agencies that support them, savings to public sector authorities who guard and sustain them, investment opportunities to private sector entities who tolerate them, and by extension, value, to both local communities and society at large, by delivering a sustainable solution through wealth creation and a break in the cycle of benefits dependency.

A millennium and a half ago, St Augustine shared this wisdom ; Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.

Dr Mandy Walker
December 2011

