

Betel UK



Betel combine a family atmosphere with therapeutic work



Directors Kent and Mary Alice Martin

Founded in 1996, Betel UK turns lives around, helping to stabilise thousands of homeless, addicted and chronically unemployed men and women. Based in Birmingham, Betel is a Christian organisation that houses 400 recovering men, women and families in 12 urban areas, free of charge at a time when government funding for residential recovery schemes is scarcer than ever. Director Kent Martin elaborates.

We provide recovery centres sustainably, without cost to the public or to thousands of low-income families who cannot afford care. We do not expect abstinence to result from short-term programmes of a few weeks or months, but by modelling a new, clean lifestyle for 18 months or longer.

Non-clinical approach

Many clinical responses to the interlocking problems of addiction, reoffending and homelessness are too short in duration, underfunded and seldom “joined up”, meaning the beneficial effect of one is delivered in isolation from the rest. My son-in-law, one of our leaders and a recovered heroin addict of 11 years, told a group of visiting police officers recently that for years he’d been in and out of short-term rehabs, prison, counselling, and methadone programmes, but the problem was, “I never learned to live clean.” Fifty-nine per cent of residents have abused substances for more than ten years, and 20 per cent more than 20 years. They have tried most conventional, shorter-term options available, only to learn that medicalising a psycho-social problem may help mask the symptoms, but cannot solve their emotional and relational issues of a personal nature.

FACTS ABOUT BETEL UK

- » Directors: Kent and Mary Alice Martin
- » Founded in 1996
- » Based in Birmingham
- » Services: Provides free-to-enter residential recovery from addiction, homelessness and social exclusion Houses some 400 recovering men, women and families in 12 urban areas
- » www.betel.uk

“Our residences are free to enter, as we hold to the core value that no one should be denied help”

The non-clinical language we employ sets a different tone from the start. New entrants are not patients or clients: they're residents. They are welcomed to an empathetic extended family, run largely by recovered peers. Instead of self-focused group therapy, a typical day consists of therapeutic work – building the personal discipline of a work ethic in teams of recovering men or women. We offer a chance to observe and to embrace an abstinent lifestyle modelled by one's surrounding peers. Our method is, simply, to model freedom, and it's powerful.

Free to enter

Britain's addiction epidemic is fed by an insatiable drive for money, from pusher to purchaser. In the last few years, government spending on residential rehabilitation services in England has been slashed by 25 per cent nationwide, and by 50 per cent in at least eight councils. During a visit by NHS-funded healthcare professionals to our south Birmingham residence a few months ago, the chief officer in charge of dispensing treatment services for an entire West Midlands county told me their budget was, essentially, zero. As

a result, they hadn't sent anyone to residential rehabilitation for over a year.

There are other private-pay options for families fortunate enough to afford them. A comparison of seven such respected residential centres ranged in price from £895 to as high as £9,240 per week. This is not accessible for the 12,000 residents over the last 23 years who arrived living on benefits. We work on radical financial principles that are boldly counter-cultural. Our residences are free to enter, as we hold to the core value that no one should be denied help.

Strongly sustainable

We generate the money required to maintain 12 residential locations, helping nearly 400 formerly unemployable men, women and families, through the diligent work of our recovering residents themselves, inspired by the examples of changed lives around them. In 2017, they earned nearly £4.5 million, 79 per cent of our annual income. Residents come to respect our guiding ethos, a conviction that it is their responsibility to foot expensive recovery costs. They share the responsibility to transform their own lives. In this way, our communities are “peer-led” – more experienced members mentor by example the newest entrants.

Our dozens of social enterprises are real-world businesses. They serve both to train on the job hundreds of recovering individuals in landscape gardening, catering, office administration, delivery driving, warehousing, sales, furniture restoration, online retailing and tree surgery. Our Rising Café restaurant, located inside Coventry Cathedral, received the honour of a royal visit, as the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge heard of our restaurant's reputation and asked to hear the stories of transformed lives. The rebuilding of trust and confidence inspires residents to take back responsibility

» SARA AND PHIL'S STORIES OF TRANSFORMATION

Sara and Phil started smoking cannabis at age 11 and became addicted to class A drugs as teenagers for more than ten years. Each diagnosed with multiple mental health disorders growing up, they lived homeless between prison sentences and police holding cells. Sara was signed off “sick for life”, told she would never work. They arrived at Betel hopeless, unemployed and living on benefits. Now drug and alcohol-free for four years, they are the supervising chefs and team leaders at our two Rising Café restaurants, where they had the honour of meeting Prince William and Kate to tell them their against-the-odds stories.



for their own lives. They proudly help pay for their own recovery, and the result is life-changing. Our charitable businesses don't simply help meet operating costs, as is generally the case with charities. In 2017, they generated enough income to convert a thousand-pound donation into £3,340.

A frequent sore point of government spending is Britain's overcrowded prisons, and 70 per cent of our residents are ex-offenders. More drug-related sentences should be served with us. In 2017, it cost twice as much to imprison someone than for us to house them: £38,000 versus £17,843. Of those costs, our residents' work contributed £13,300 each towards their living expenses. Our model breeds hope, turning on its head the notion that addicted ex-offenders are helpless to change. Based on a government cost-analysis study we have saved society more than £130 million since 1996 in reduced rehabilitation, social welfare benefits, crime, prison and medical costs.

Long-term solution

Broken lives need time to heal. The pressures of pragmatism and politics demand positive results, regardless of available funding and its chokehold on recovery services. When we first opened our doors in 1996, a desperately addicted person was eligible for up to 18 months' residential funding. By 2018, the norm is now two to 12 weeks. The scale of this losing battle is captured in the government's own NICE guidelines, which admit that of one million alcohol-dependent people in England, only six per cent receive treatment each year.

Very few people who are socially disadvantaged by years of addiction, offending, homelessness and unemployment have sufficient time to change in two to 12 weeks. We need longer-term, vital alternatives to today's norm. The life-transforming values required to counteract anti-social behaviour aren't derived from

» KIM AND NICKIE'S STORIES OF TRANSFORMATION

From age five, Kim (right) was taken into care from alcoholic parents. Addicted to heroin for 11 years, she was classed a prolific offender with over 100 offences. When not in prison, she worked the streets to fund her habit. Now married with two children, she works in Betel's finance office and oversees 32 recovering women. Nickie was addicted to alcohol for five years when doctors gave her eight weeks to live. Before entering Betel she lost everything, including a painting and decorating business, and came to us living on benefits. Now a women's support leader, she helps run our gardening business admin, when not happily painting somewhere around our properties.



government housing schemes or back-to-work programmes. They are not necessarily found in expensive professional therapies.

Our experience is that most people's healing initiates from the subtler art of crafting healthy relationships; there is healing power in community. Our residences universally uphold the virtues of honesty, kindness, diligence, respect for others and forgiveness espoused by Christian and other faith traditions. It's these that gradually restore trust and human dignity to broken lives. In an atmosphere where healthy relationships nurture everyday needs for belonging, self-confidence and purpose, individuals see the worth in rebuilding a new life around socially desirable values.

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